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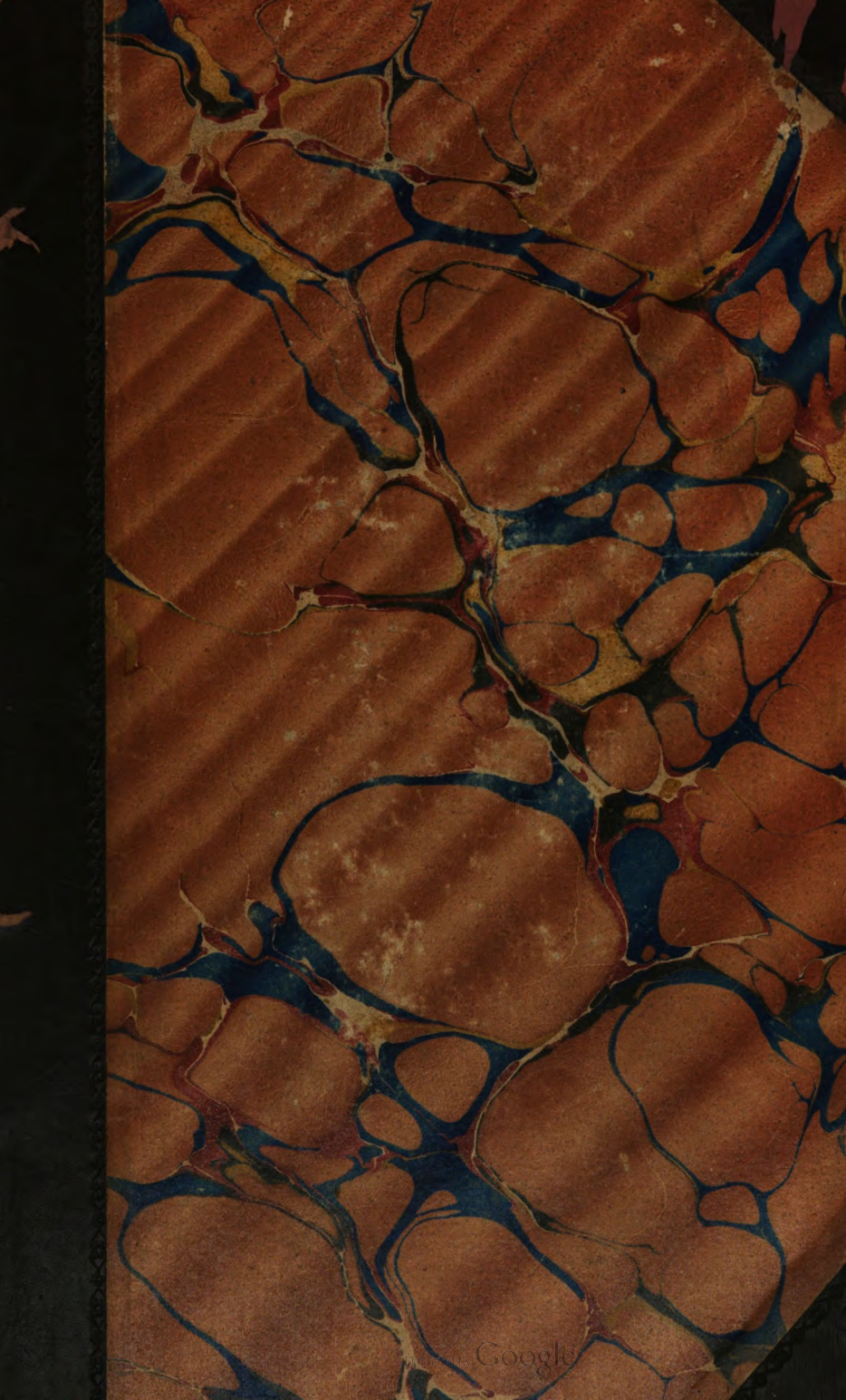
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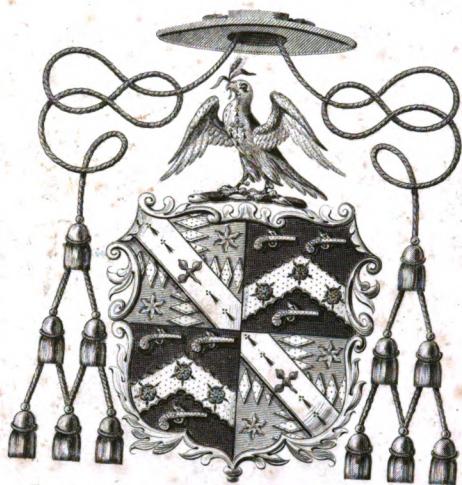
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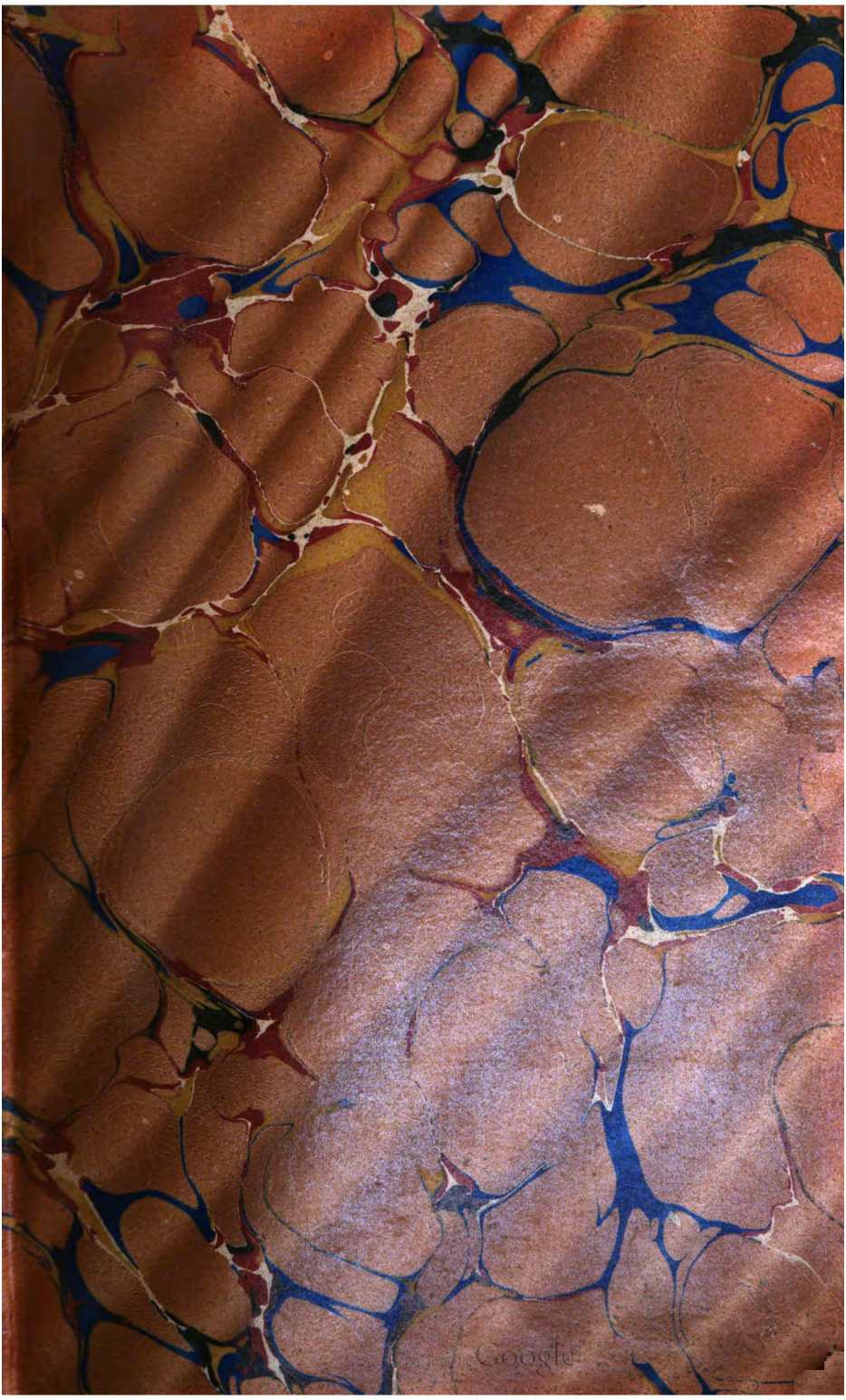
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EN TOUT PARFAIT

The Very Rev. Charles Parfitt.



P.D. 14.

Bt for Prior Park, Bath.

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1525
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SERMONS AND MORAL DISCOURSES,

FOR ALL THE
SUNDAYS AND PRINCIPAL FESTIVALS

OF THE YEAR,
ON THE
MOST IMPORTANT TRUTHS AND MAXIMS OF THE
GOSPEL.

BY THE

REV. W. GAHAN, O. S. A. EX-PROV.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A PREFACE

BY THE RIGHT REV. DR. JAMES DOYLE.

*Preach the Word, urge in Season and out of Season : Reprove, beseech,
rebuke in all Patience and Doctrine.*

2 Tim. c. iv. v. 2.

THIRD EDITION, REVISED AND CORRECTED.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1825.



PREFACE.

Carlow, July 1st, 1825.

My dear Sir,

I am greatly rejoiced to find, that you intend to publish a new and improved Edition of the Rev. W. Gahan's Sermons ; I feel confident you will thereby render an important service to the religion and morals of the country. This work, which, for some time past, had become extremely scarce, has, since its first publication, been justly prized, as the most useful in its kind, which at any period had issued from the Irish Press. It seemed to bear stamped upon it, the entire character of the venerable Author ; the piety, simplicity, learning, and zeal, of Gahan, were discernable in all its pages, so that it served to diffuse after his death the odour of his virtues, or to transplant them from his grave into the hearts of his countrymen.

These Sermons consist of panegyrics of Saints, of doctrinal discourses on the great mysteries of the Christian Faith, of the most earnest and pathetic appeals in favour of the distressed, but principally of moral treatises, by which every class of Christians, in whatever state of life they may be placed, are instructed in their respective duties.

The great characteristic of Gahan's Sermons is not eloquence in the popular sense of the word ; it is *usefulness* ;

we no where find in them the towering sublimity of a Bossuet, they have not all the captivating unction of a Massillon, they do not superabound in the learning and irresistible force of a Bourdaloue ; but they instruct, they reprove, they persuade, by the solidity of the thoughts, by the clearness and simplicity of the style, by the judicious introduction and application of the sacred Scriptures, but, above all, by the piety, sincerity, and zeal of the writer, which they every where display.

Such are the qualities which have endeared the Sermons of the venerable Gahan to the Catholic Clergy, and Laity of Ireland. The former have found in them, the finest model of that plain and simple, but correct and useful, mode of instruction, which is best adapted to their several congregations. In Gahan, there is nothing conceited, nothing swoln, there is no bombast, he never affects to be beautiful or sublime, though nothing is more beautiful than the plain and earnest manner in which he enforces the practice of the Gospel virtues ; nothing more sublime than the simple picture which he draws of the baneful effects of vice. He never introduces the figures and fancies of a profane or a poetic imagination, he is content with the Apostle to preach from the fulness of his own heart, " to preach Christ and him crucified," not in the sublimity of human speech, but in that virtue and power which are bestowed on those who seek not to please men, but to gain their souls to God. These Sermons have not been less valued by the laity ; because, to them they presented a full and clear, yet compendious view of the doctrine of Christ. They explained every duty, they inculcated every virtue, they exposed and reprov'd every vice, they calmly entered into the stores of the memory, or into the recesses of the heart, they analyzed the pas-

sions, and referred to experience, to examples, and to the word of God, for proofs of their effects upon the present and future state of man. There was no where to be found in them any personal allusions, any bitter reproof of individuals or classes, nothing which could betray a feeling not the fruit of the purest charity, or of the most disinterested zeal.

When Gahan instructed the infant, he presented to it as it were the breast of a mother, and allured it to partake of the milk of the Gospel. When he pleaded for the indigent, he did not burn with indignation against the miser, he besought him by the bowels of the compassion of Jesus Christ. When he combated the sophisms of incredulity or remonstrated with the apathy of the worldling, he was cool, dispassionate, and calm. He furnished to them proofs sufficient to convince, but he trusted more for their conversion, to that God "who holds in his hands the hearts of men," than to the force of argument, or to the severity of rebuke. In chiding the sinner he seemed rather to weep with him over his misfortunes than to reproach him for the abuse of grace, or the transgression of the Law; so when he appealed to the divine justice, or to the "wrath which is to come," he never failed to remind his audience that God has sworn in the Prophet, that "he wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live." In teaching the just to become still more justified, Gahan, without referring to himself, gives a picture of his own life, and seems to say through every page which he wrote on this most important part of Christian morality, "be an imitator of me, as I am of Christ." Meekness, patience in suffering, truth, fidelity, temperance, penance; these are every where inculcated by him as the ordinary virtues which grow, as it were, at the foot of the cross; he

mixes them up with all his exhortations; whilst justice, obedience, chastity, poverty of spirit, unceasing prayer, forgiveness of injuries, faith, hope, and charity, are the themes of his zealous praise, the objects of his most earnest recommendation. He unites these virtues in many of his sermons, with the sufferings of our divine Redeemer, in order to show, that it is by the practice of them we are crucified to the world, and intimately united to Christ.

I forbear to enter into an analysis of these Sermons; or to point out at any length their excellencies to the public; they are known and justly appreciated; and if I have thus briefly expressed my feelings and opinions regarding them, it is not in the vain hope of advancing the fame of their Author, or promoting the circulation of the work itself, but that I might give expression to sentiments which I have long cherished for a venerable Ecclesiastic, and also to bear testimony to the zeal, which you evince to promote by this publication, the interest of that holy Religion, of which Gahan, during life, was the child and the ornament, and of which, after death, by his writings, he continues to be the friend and advocate.

I am, my dear Sir,

Your faithful Servant in Christ,

✱ J. DOYLE.

To Mr. RICHARD COYNE,
4, *Capel-Sreet, Dublin.*

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SERMONS

AND

MORAL DISCOURSES,

&c. &c.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

On the General Judgment.

Tuncvidebunt Filium Hominis venientem in nube, cum protestate magna et majestate.—*Luc. c. xxi. v. 27.*

Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great Might and Majesty.—Luke, c. xxi. v. 27.

THIS being the first Sunday of Advent, the Church, in order to inspire her children with that penitential spirit which is suitable to this holy time, displays one of the most terrifying truths of the Christian Religion, and proposes on this day to our serious consideration the tremendous mystery of the last and general judgment, which is to decide whether we are to be the happiest or most unhappy creatures that God can make us; whether heaven, with all its infinite joys, or hell, with all its inconceivable torments, is to be our everlasting inheritance; whether we are for ever to sing joyful Allelulias with the blessed choirs of angels and saints above, or to burn eternally in flames of fire with legions of merciless devils below. The condemnation of the rich glutton who was buried in hell at the time of his death, as the Gospel informs us, and the happy end of poor Lazarus, who was immediately translated into Abraham's bosom when he departed this life, plainly show that the soul undergoes a particular judgment, the very instant that death separates it from the body. But besides this particular judgment, there is a day of general judgment, appointed by God, for all mankind to appear together before the awful tribunal of Jesus Christ.

Divines assign various reasons for the necessity of this universal judgment; first, in order to manifest the power of Jesus Christ, and to justify before all men the conduct of God's providence, which often sends riches and prosperity to the wicked in this life, and visits the just with adversity and afflictions; secondly, to separate the good from the bad, and to reward the one and condemn the other publicly, in the face of all mankind; thirdly, to augment the glory of the elect, and the confusion of the reprobate, in proportion to their respective merits or demerits; fourthly, a general judgment is necessary, that the bodies both of the just and the wicked may receive their sentence, and that every one may be recompensed *according to the very things he has done in the flesh, whether good or evil*, as the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. v. 10; for the justice of God requires that the bodies should be judged as well as the souls, and that they be made partakers either of eternal glory or eternal punishment, either as they have been instruments of virtue or instruments of vice in this life.

The particular time or day allotted for this universal judgment has never been revealed to any creature, and consequently is known to God alone. However, the sacred Scripture assures us that it shall be preceded by several dreadful preliminaries, such as plagues, wars, famines, earthquakes, strange signs in the sun, in the moon, in the stars, in the elements and seasons, and by a most cruel persecution, which shall be raised by the wicked Antichrist during his tyrannical reign of three years and an half. But all these signs, though sufficient to strike terror into any heart that will but consider them, will be only faint shadows of what is to ensue on that woeful and bitter day, when the cup of God's wrath shall be poured out on the earth, and the Sovereign Judge shall make his appearance in the clouds of Heaven, with great Power and Majesty, armed with the flaming sword of justice.

My design at present is to give you some faint idea of this awful mystery, by laying before you in plain and intelligible language, its principal circumstances, drawn from the sacred Scriptures and the writings of the ancient Fathers. In order to animate the just to perseverance, and to alarm sinners into a speedy repentance, I will endeavour to show ye that the day of judgment will be a day of inexpressible joy and consolation for the former, and a day of unutterable sorrow, shame and confusion for the latter. But as my efforts must be vain indeed, unless aided and supported by thee, O divine Spirit, we most humbly beseech thee to enlighten our understandings, to give unction and energy to my words, and docility to the hearts of my hearers, that I may expatiate on this important subject to thy honour and glory, and to their edification. Intercede for us, O blessed mother of Jesus, that we may be favoured with these graces. For this end we salute thee with the words of the Archangel—*Ave Maria*.

As the world has been once destroyed by water, at the time of the general deluge, so it is to be destroyed again by fire. Previous to its destruction, the Gospel shall be preached all over the earth, and the Jews shall be converted and enter into the pale of the Church. The charity of the generality of Christians shall grow cold, as the Scripture tells us, their faith shall grow languid, iniquity shall abound, and the Prophets Henech and Elias, shall come clothed in sackcloth, to preach against the impostures of Antichrist, whose days shall be cut short, through an effect of God's mercy, in favour of the elect, lest they should be seduced and perverted. Mankind, in the interim, shall be under the greatest apprehensions and consternation, and as the Gospel expresses it, *shall wither away with fear in expectation on the approaching dissolution of the universe.* The Heavens will open the first scene of this amazing tragedy; *there shall be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars.* The sun shall change its glittering beams into more than Egyptian darkness, and shall bury the world in horror and obscurity. The moon, that gilds the gloomy shades of night shall be then covered with a bloody veil; and the stars which now delight our eyes with their glorious prospect, shall put on the frightful shapes of blazing comets, and fall from the firmament. The elements shall be dissolved, and the powers of Heaven shall be moved; the earth shall shake and tremble in a dreadful manner; the air shall flame with flashes of lightning, and echo with peals of thunder; the sea shall foam with fury, and swell its raging billows above the tops of mountains, the rivers shall forsake their usual channels and natural courses; valleys shall be filled up, mountains overturned, and hills levelled with the ground: In short, all nature shall fall into strange convulsions, and seem ready to start from its frame, and a raging fire shall arise to set the whole world in flames, and to reduce all the kingdoms of the earth into a dreadful chaos. Such, O deluded worldlings, is to be the fatal catastrophe of all those transitory enjoyments, perishable riches, fleeting pleasures, empty honours and painted toys, with the love of which ye are at present so blindly infatuated. Alas! all these things shall vanish and end in smoke. It is then, my dear brethren, that the disciples of the cross, who are now scorned, reviled and persecuted for justice sake, shall triumph over the pride of the world. It is then that an unspotted conscience shall be counted a more valuable treasure than all the riches, all the enjoyments of this life. It is then that it shall be deemed more glorious to have led a penitential life, and to have served God in humility and retirement, than to have subdued kingdoms and empires. No distinction will be made between kings and subjects, masters and servants, rich and poor, great and small, but what shall be grounded upon the merits or demerits of their past lives.—Cæsars, Pompeys, Alexanders, and all the celebrated heroes

of antiquity, who have formerly waded through streams of blood to crowns and sceptres, shall be treated then with no more respect than the meanest of their slaves. No excuse will be admitted, no apology received, no entreaties regarded. They must appear indiscriminately before the bar of divine justice, as soon as the last trumpet shall sound these words in the four corners of the earth: *Arise ye dead: come to judgment.* If a loud clap of thunder now affright us, cries out the devout Ephraim, how shall we then be able to withstand the sound of the last trumpet, louder than any thunder? The great St. Jerome, that prodigy of mortification, who spent several years in the desert in bitter tears and penitential rigours, assures us, that he could neither eat nor drink without imagining that he heard this trumpet sounding constantly in his ears, and summoning the dead to rise. Then *in a moment*, and *in the twinkling of an eye*, as St. Paul speaks, all the children of Adam shall come to life again, and rise out of the bowels of the earth in the very same body and with the same soul which they had before. The land and sea will in an instant throw up the carcasses which they contain, and Heaven, Purgatory and Hell, will restore the souls which they possess, in order to be re-united to their respective bodies, and never more to be separated for all eternity. O with what transports of joy will the souls of the just meet and embrace their glorious bodies! On the contrary, with what reluctance, horror and aversion, shall the souls of the reprobate be forced to re-enter their hideous carcasses! The bodies of the former, which in this life have been mortified with fasts and self-denials, and made instrumental to works of charity and piety, shall then be endowed with all the beautiful qualities and advantages of a spiritualized substance; whilst, on the contrary, the bodies of the latter, which have been pampered and indulged, surfeited, debauched and defiled with filthy and abominable crimes, shall rise up loathsome, obscure, and fit only to be the fuel of everlasting flames; immortal indeed, but for the purpose of enduring immortal torments.

It is in the valley of Josaphat, according to the Prophet Joel, c. iii. that all nations, and all the tribes of the earth are to be assembled together, in order to receive their final sentence, either eternal salvation or eternal reprobation. This place is said to be situated near the city of Jerusalem, in sight of Mount Olivet and Mount Calvary, whereon our Blessed Saviour shed his precious blood for our redemption. St. Hilary tells us that his judgment-seat is to stand upon the very spot where his Cross was formerly planted; that the glory of his Divine Majesty may be made manifest in the very place where his sacred humanity suffered the greatest ignomy. He *will there demonstrate his power*, says St. Augustine, *because he there demonstrated his patience.* The very sight of him there, says this holy Doctor, will be a greater torment to the wicked

than the pains of hell. *Seeing him, says the wise man, they shall be struck with a dreadful fear.* Before him shall be carried the victorious trophy and royal standard of the Cross, according to these words of St. Matt. c. xxiv. v. 30: *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and that, to the inexpressible comfort of the just, but to the eternal shame and confusion of the reprobate, who being there reminded of the boundless love and unparalleled charity that brought the Son of God from the throne of his glory, and made him obedient unto death, will be ready to sink with shame at the thoughts of the bad return they made him for all that he did and suffered for their sake.* Hence St. Jerome says, that the Cross will loudly reproach them on the last day with their base ingratitude, and convict them of having frustrated the designs of Divine mercy, through their own obstinacy and perverseness. Their confusion will be still increased, when *they shall behold the Son of Man, himself in person, coming in a cloud with great might and majesty, encompassed with legions of Angels and Saints.* His second coming on that day will be majestic and terrible, because, as St. Augustine remarks, his first coming in the adorable mystery of incarnation, was mean and contemptible. At his first coming into the world he assumed the quality of a most merciful Redeemer, and *came not to call the just, but sinners, to repentance.* At his second coming he will assume the quality of an inflexible Judge, and descend from the right hand of his heavenly Father, to reward the just with a never-fading crown of glory, and to banish impenitent sinners out of his sight, into hell's unquenchable flames.

At his first coming he appeared in mortal flesh, in the livery and *similitude of a servant*, as the Apostle speaks, and came to be judged, and to save the world by the effusion of his blood. At his second coming he will appear clothed with an immortal and impassible body, that will retain the marks of his five sacred wounds, and outshine the brightness of the sun. Thus shall he then come to condemn the wicked world, and to judge both the living and the dead according to their works. Sinners of all ranks, states and conditions, will then begin, alas! too late to lament their past follies, and bewail their unhappy fate. Being singled out as the sad victims of God's justice, and the objects of his wrath and indignation, they shall be driven with ignominy to the left hand of the Sovereign Judge; for, as the Gospel informs us, *the Angels of the Lord shall go forth, and they shall gather out all scandals, and them that work iniquity.* The tares shall be separated from among the wheat, the chaff from among the corn, the wicked from among the just, children from their parents, friends from their kindred and intimates.

At present, the Lord makes his sun shine indiscriminately on the good and the bad; but then the scene shall be altered,

and the dreadful separation shall take place, that the virtues and merits of the just, which are now overlooked by the world, and often practised in silence and obscurity, may be manifested and publicly rewarded. The great book of accounts will be produced, and every one will have as clear a view of all the particulars of his life, as if they were written in the beams of the sun. *The unfortunate sinner shall see all his sins ranged before him in exact order*, says St. Augustine. The abominations, which are now so industriously palliated and committed in the greatest secresy, shall be then exposed to the eyes of the whole world. All our thoughts, words and actions; all our desires, and the most secret intensions of our hearts; all the subtle insinuations of pride, and contrivances of self-love, shall be examined and weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary. — The least venial sin we are guilty of shall not escape the all-discerning eyes of the omniscient Judge; for as the least good action, though it were but a cup of cold water given for his sake, will not go unrewarded, so in like manner, the least fault we commit, though it be an idle word, will not be left unpunished. Jesus Christ will search Jerusalem with a lantern, as the Scripture phrase expresses it; he will discover blemishes and imperfections even in this elect.

O what shall then become of Babylon? cries out St. Augustine. What shall then become of a sinful soul, if so strict an inquiry is to be made in the holy city of Jerusalem? *If the just man shall scarce be saved, the wicked man and the sinner, where shall they appear?* says St. Pet. cap. iv. v. 18. What shall become of habitual cursers, swearers, blasphemers, lechers, drunkards, detractors and extortioners? What will become of bad Christians and wicked Catholics, who, instead of conforming their lives to the maxims of the Gospel, and keeping up to the duties of their religion, are by their immoralities a disgrace to the Church, and a scandal to their profession? Their faith, instead of saving them, will then be the rule of their condemnation, and make them liable to a far greater punishment than Pagans and Infidels, who never had the light of faith to direct them, according to the words of St. Matthew, c. ix. *Sodom and Gomorrha shall be more favourably treated on the day of judgment.* The very Nivites will rise up and accuse them with having been rebels and traitors to their God, enemies of the Cross, transgressors of their baptismal vows, and murderers of Jesus Christ, whom they're crucified by their repeated crimes. The nails that pierced his sacred hands and feet on Mount Calvary will bear witness against them, and upbraid them with their perfidiousness; the spear that opened his side will plead strongly against them, and cry out for vengeance; nay, the whole Court of Heaven will then espouse the cause of their injured Creator, and regard wicked and impenitent Christians with horror and aversion. Whatever side they may happen to turn their eyes, they shall see nothing that will

afford them any comfort, but on the contrary, every thing that will contribute to increase their anguish, and to cover them with an heavy load of shame and confusion. Beneath their feet they shall see Hell gaping for them, and the earth opening to swallow them up alive. Above their heads they shall behold the wrathful countenance of an inflexible Judge, and on every side whole legions of infernal furies and merciless devils, waiting only for the signal, and ready to snatch them away, and bury their souls and bodies in the dismal dungeons and fiery furnaces of hell.

The merciful arms of our crucified Redeemer will then be no longer extended, as they now are, to embrace repenting sinners; nor will his sacred head be bowed down to give them the kiss of peace. Neither mercy, nor even one single ray of mercy, will appear then in the Fountain of mercy, says one of the holy Fathers: for the inexhaustible source of God's mercy, which during this life flows incessantly upon those who have due recourse to it, shall on that day turn the whole course of its stream away from sinners. It will then be too late to think of doing penance; acts of contrition will then be of no use or service; prayers and entreaties will avail nothing; justice shall then sit on the bench, and perform its part with the utmost rigour, as mercy does at present with a boundless liberality.

No tongue is able to express the joy and consolation that will replenish the hearts of the just, who are to be placed with honour on the right hand, in order to judge the *twelve Tribes of Israel*; as the Gospel speaks. The Sovereign Judge will address himself first to them, with a sweet and amiable countenance, and invite them to the possession of his heavenly kingdom, with these words of comfort: *Venite, benedicti, &c.* Come, ye blessed of my Father, &c. The sinner, on seeing them thus honoured, will swell with indignation, says the Royal Prophet. *He will gnash his teeth with spite, and pine away with envy*, when he beholds those very persons, whom he formerly looked upon as the dregs and outcasts of the world, ranked among the children of God, and the heirs of life everlasting.

The sacred Scripture informs us, that the children of Israel were seized with terror when they heard the loud voice of the Angel, who published the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, in the midst of thunder and lightning; that the brothers of the Patriarch Joseph were struck speechless when he said that he was Joseph whom they had sold to the Egyptians; that Ananias and Saphira were struck dead on hearing the angry voice of St. Peter; that Saul was struck blind and prostrated on the road to Damascus by the force of these words: *I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest*; and we read in the Gospel, that the multitude that came to apprehend our blessed Saviour in the garden, reeled backwards and fell down as if thunder-struck, at the sound of these two words which he said to them, *Ego sum, I am*. This made St. Leo cry out, If the humility of

Jesus Christ was then so powerful, when he came to be judged, what will his almighty power do when he shall come to judge? How shall the reprobate be able to withstand his thundering voice, when, turning himself towards them, with fire in his eyes, and anger in his looks, he will reproach them with their black ingratitude? He will then show them the marks of the wounds in his hands and in his feet, which their sins had inflicted, and convict them in the face of the universe, that their perdition lies at their own door. He will convince them that he left nothing undone for their salvation; but in return for his excessive love, that they despised and betrayed him, persecuted him in his members on earth, sold him for a sordid interest, for a brutal pleasure, for a momentary satisfaction; that they crowned his head with thorns, pierced his side with a spear, and crucified him afresh by their horrid sins and abominations. Justice, therefore, at length taking place, the Sovereign Judge shall proceed to pronounce their definitive and irrevocable sentence. O prepare yourselves, my brethren, to hear this terrifying sentence, the very rehearsal of which is sufficient to make you tremble. Every word it contains is a thunderbolt, that will make the whole Valley of Josaphat ring with lamentations, woes, and sighs: *Discedite à me: Begone from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire. Depart from me, your God, your Creator, your most bountiful Benefactor, whom ye have so frequently and so grievously offended; depart from me, your Father and your sovereign good, whom ye have basely despised; depart from me, your Jesus and your Redeemer, whose blood you have so often trampled upon. Begone ye accursed out of my sight.* Not able to plead any excuse, or to answer the least word in their own defence, or to deny any one single point laid to their charge, the unhappy wretches must depart, and with a dreadful malediction also: *Begone from ye accursed! But to what place must they go? Into Hell-fire! For what purpose? To burn there in the company of the Devil and of his confederates. How long? Alas! for millions and millions of ages, as long as God will be God, without the least interval of repose; or the least hopes of ever having any abatement in their pains. They are to be deprived of the sight of God for ever and ever. They are to be excluded from the glory of Heaven for a never ending eternity; they are to suffer all the torments that the rigour of God's justice is able to inflict on them, in proportion to the number and quality of their past sins; they will in vain cry out to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of their angry Judge. They will wish for death, but death shall fly away from them. A violent fire shall burn them without end; bitter regrets shall excruciate them without intermission. They shall be eternally penetrated with flames, eternally torn with remorse, eternally gnawed by a worm that is never to die.— Their worm shall never die, say St. Mark, c. ix. and their fire*

shall never be extinguished. O my dearest brethren, let me conjure you, by the bowels of Jesus Christ, to reflect seriously on these terrifying truths. Let the sound of the last trumpet echo frequently in your ears. Let the memory of the last and bitter day of wrath possess your souls incessantly, and excite ye to a speedy and hearty repentance for your past sins, before the gate of mercy is shut in your face. Let it inspire ye with a fixed resolution to prevent the terrors of God's justice, by a virtuous life, and to prepare for a favourable judgment before the time of grace and salvation is at an end. The very thoughts of the last judgment have heretofore wrought wonderful conversions in Christianity; numberless sinners have been thereby reclaimed from vice, and roused out of the fatal lethargy of sin; and some of the most illustrious Saints have been excited to redouble their fervour, and work their salvation in a holy fear and trembling.

O that I was able to inspire ye with the like happy sentiments! O that I could animate the just to perseverance, and mollify the hearts of sinners into tears of compunction! But this is the work of thy all-powerful grace, O sweetest Jesus. We prostrate ourselves, therefore, at the feet of thy mercy, and most humbly implore the assistance of thy grace. Vouchsafe to look upon this congregation with an eye of pity, and do not suffer thy precious blood to be shed for any of us in vain. Open the eyes of those who are straying away from the path of salvation, that becoming sensible of their errors, they may sincerely renounce, and heartily detest them. Thou hast said, there is joy in Heaven upon a sinner doing penance. Grant, we beseech thee, that Heaven may rejoice at our conversion, and that we may, on the last day, be of the happy number of those who are to be invited to the sacred mansions of bliss with these comfortable words: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for ye from all eternity, &c.*—Which is the blessing I heartily wish ye all. In the name of the Father, &c. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

On the Sin of Scandal.

Beatus est, qui non fuerit scandalizatus in me:—*St. Matt. c. xi. v. 6.*

Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me.—*St. Matt. c. xi. v. 6.*

AFTER so many shining miracles, the Saviour of the world might justly expect that mankind would not be scandalized at his Gospel, but rather glory in embracing and following it.—So many sick persons instantaneously cured of different diseases,

and the dead risen to life, with a thousand other prodigies which marked out the visible hand and virtue of a God, ought undoubtedly to have induced the whole earth not only to respect and venerate, but also to adore and worship Jesus Christ. Yet how unspeakable are the ways of the Lord! Notwithstanding these miracles he became a subject of scandal for the world, insomuch that he declares them *blessed* who shall not be affected by it. In effect, the profane and wicked world was scandalized at his person, at his doctrine, at his sufferings, and at his death, so as to make St. Paul, when speaking of the mystery of the Cross, call it the *Scandal* of the Cross. Such was the language of the Apostle; but glory be to God, this scandal has in fine ceased. Jesus Christ has triumphed over the world, his doctrine has been every where received, his religion has been established upon the ruins of Paganism and upon the destruction of the Jewish synagogue, and his Cross has been transplanted from the places of execution to the foreheads of Monarchs and Princes of the earth, as St. Augustine speaks. But this scandal, of which Christ was formerly the object, has been unhappily succeeded by another kind of scandal, whereof we ourselves are the authors; for though we are not scandalized at present at Jesus Christ himself, nor at his sufferings and death, yet how often do we scandalize him in the person of our neighbour, as the Scripture says, that Saul persecuted him in the members of his mystical body, the Church. Wherefore, instead of declaring those happy who shall not be scandalized in him, we may, by an opposite consequence, conclude, that they are unhappy who scandalize Jesus Christ in scandalizing their neighbour. By *Scandal* I do not mean the sin of calumny or defamation; but I understand here, by scandal, all kind of bad example, or all sort of disedifying words and actions, which of their own nature are apt to endanger the virtue and innocence of our neighbour, or which, by reason of his peculiar weakness, do become a stumbling-block in his way, and actually prove the occasion of the spiritual ruin and consequent damnation of his soul. The design of the following discourse is to give you a just idea of this destructive vice of scandal, and to deter you from it, by showing you how infectious it is in its own nature, how pernicious in its effects, how fatal in its consequences; in short, how offensive it is to God, how injurious to our neighbour, and how detrimental to the scandalous sinner himself.—Unhappy, therefore, is he who gives scandal. This shall be my first point. But doubly unhappy is he who gives scandal, when, by the office and rank he holds in human society, he is particularly obliged to show good example. This shall be my second point, and the entire subject of your favourable attention. Let us previously invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the B. Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel, and saying, *Ave Maria*, &c.

Christ our Lord has forewarned us, that scandals should happen unto the end of time. It is even necessary, says he in the Gospel, that scandals come; not indeed that they are absolutely necessary, but because they are in a manner unavoidable, considering the frailty and depravity of human nature, and the many incentives to vice that occur daily in the world. It is only at the end of the world, that the Angels of the Lord shall go forth, and effectually remove all scandals from his kingdom for ever, as we read in ch. xiii. of St. *Matthew*. Until that period the church militant shall always have to bewail the disorderly conduct of some of her members, in spite of all her zealous endeavours to reclaim them from their evil ways. Until then there shall always be in her communion vessels of clay and ignominy, as well as vessels of gold and vessels of election. Chaff will be mixed with the wheat, and tares will be suffered to grow up with the good corn, until the harvest-time, or the day of judgment, when the dreadful separation is to take place for ever! and, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, the Lord shall thoroughly cleanse his floor, and gather his wheat into the barn, but the straw and chaff he will burn with fire never to be extinguished, *Matt.* iii. 12. The present time is a time of forbearance; but then the ministers of his justice shall gather out all scandals, and them that work iniquity, and cast them into the furnace, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Of all the crying sins that are then to draw down a torrent of divine vengeance upon their criminal heads, the sin of scandal is one of the most horrid, most detestable, and most diabolical. It is so heinous in its nature, so pernicious in its effects, and so fatal in its consequences, that neither words can sufficiently express, nor thoughts rightly comprehend its malice. Other sins are generally committed in private, and lie as it were buried in the horror of darkness, but scandal openly takes off the mask, and walks abroad at noon-day to spread its infection. In other sins men usually betray some kind of fear, awe, respect and bashfulness; they are disquieted in the commission of their crimes, and blush when they come to the knowledge of others; but scandal tramples over all laws with contempt, and seems to stifle all the sentiments that reason, modesty and religion inspire. It is common to all vices to level and strike at the honour and glory of God; but it is peculiar to the sin of scandal to rise up in a more bare-faced and determinate manner against the Almighty. It invades his honour and most sacred rights with more effrontery and audaciousness. It ruins his most noble hand-ywork. It overturns his best designs, and causes his holy name to be blasphemed, as the Apostle observes, *Rom.* ii. 24. where he says: *Through you the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles.* All other crimes contribute in some measure to tarnish the splendor and beauty of the Church of God, but scandal disfigures the face of Christianity. It

covers it with shame and confusion. It degrades it, and renders it contemptible in the eyes of its enemies. Is it not to the sin of scandal, and to the seduction of bad example, that we are to ascribe the general corruption of morals, which seems to be gaining ground very fast in our days, and which may be looked upon as the most dangerous war and persecution that hell ever raised against the Church? Is it not to scandal that we are to impute the decay of piety and devotion, which, alas! is but too visible in the present vainly boasted of enlightened age of philosophy and philanthropy? In short, is it not to the sin of scandal that we are to attribute the deluge of iniquity which overflows society, and appears to be pervading almost all ranks and conditions? Men corrupt, seduce, and pervert each other by bad example, bad advice, and by circulating wicked books, replete with the pernicious principles and perverse maxims of the world. They openly convey the poison of corruption by their licentious discourses, irreligious conversation, double entendres, equivocal expressions, indecent fashions and dissolute manners, as if they only lived together mutually to destroy and work each other's eternal ruin by their scandals. O scandal, thou horrid and detestable sin! how offensive must thou be to the living God? Yes, my brethren, this sin defeats at once the great end that God proposed to himself in the work of our creation, as it perverts and ruins the souls which he made to see and enjoy him for ever in the kingdom of Heaven. There is no sin, therefore, that the holy scripture gives us a more frightful idea of than of the sin of scandal. St. Paul compares it to an *odour of death*, which procreates mortality, 2 Cor. c. ii. v. 16. It is also compared to a *pestilential vapour*, which spreads infection on every side, and to a *contagious blast*, which conveys a subtle poison into the bottom of the heart, and to a *bad leaven*, which sours and corrupts the whole mass of dough that it besprinkles; and to an *envenomed arrow*, *darted by a noon-day devil*, in order to cause a dreadful havoc in the world, and to carry destruction into the soul. Scandal is likewise compared to a *leprosy*, which having infected one member, soon diffuses its malignant qualities into the rest of the members, and disfigures the whole body. Such is the malignity and contagion, such is the force of bad example, as Tertullian says, that it forms souls to vice more readily than good example forms them to virtue, and plunges them faster into the flames of hell than good example qualifies them for the joys of heaven. Scandal also directly opposes the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it destroys and damns what he came to seek and save by his sufferings.—It wrests from his hands, and tears from his very bosom those souls which he purchased with the last drop of his precious blood. It robs him of what was dearer to him than his very life. It cancels the fruits of his passion and death, and renders the effusion of his sacred blood unprofitable. In short,

it annihilates the price of his adorable redemption. This made St. Bernard say, that they who by their scandalous example, bad advice, or evil solicitations, importunities and intrigues, inveigle, decoy and seduce others into mortal sin, are in some measure more criminal than the Jews who crucified Jesus Christ on Mount Calvary, because he was then mortal, and willing to suffer for the salvation of the world, and because they were ignorant of what they did, and did not believe him to be the Son of God when they crucified him. Moreover, in shedding his innocent blood, they co-operated in some respect towards the redemption of mankind; and contributed, contrary to their intention, to the accomplishment of the merciful designs of Heaven: whereas, on the other hand, scandalous sinners, who draw innocent souls from the narrow path of virtue into the broad road of perdition, openly counteract the great work of human redemption, and frustrate the designs of the divine mercy. As far as in them lies, they persecute and crucify Jesus Christ in his living members on earth, now that he is glorious and immortal in Heaven. They destroy the efficacy of his sufferings, and render the merits of death fruitless to those whom they scandalize. What can be more outrageously impious? What can be more injurious to the redemption of our blessed Saviour? What can be more directly opposite to the grand object of his mission and the end of all his labours? What can be more inconsistent with the great law of charity, and the first precept of Christian morality?

According to the Holy Fathers, it is one of the most divine and most meritorious employments on earth to co-operate with Christ in the salvation of souls, and to bring about the conversion of sinners; and they who zealously apply themselves to this heavenly function, are called in the scripture Men of God, Angels of God, Apostles, Ambassadors and Ministers of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it is one of the most detestable and hellish employments on earth to effect the spiritual ruin and destruction of souls, and they who co-operate therein, and who propagate vice by word or example, may be justly stiled emissaries of hell, agents and deputies, instruments and condutors of satan, since they second his malicious designs, and avowedly espouse his interest in preference to the honour and glory of God. Scandal is of course a diabolical vice, that makes men bear a strong resemblance of the devil; for as the devil was a murderer and destroyer of souls from the beginning, as the Gospel says, so in like manner the authors and causes of scandal are murderers and destroyers of as many souls as are perverted and lost by their means.

It is herein, according to St. Paul, that the grievousness of the sin of scandal consists. *Through thy knowledge shall thy brother perish, for whom Christ died?* says the Apostle, 1 Cor. c. viii. v. 11. and on this was founded the pathetic and lively remonstrance he made to the Corinthians, when he conjured

them to renounce certain customs they were attached to, and at which their brethren, less confirmed in faith, were greatly scandalized. In effect, what a horrid crime must it be to destroy and murder a soul ransomed with the blood of the Son of God, and to be the cause of its forfeiting its innocence, and its right and title to the kingdom of Heaven? If robbery, that strips men of the worldly and perishable goods of fortune, which they must abandon at the hour of death; if calumny, which blasts their reputation, and deprives them of the respect and esteem they have required; if murder, that takes away the natural life of the body, which is but of a short duration, be deemed crimes so enormous and odious in the sight of God and in the eyes of the world, that even the civil laws have justly established rigorous punishments against them, how enormous and odious must the sin of scandal be, since by it, a soul stamped with the image of God, and redeemed with the blood of his beloved Son, is robbed of the inestimable treasures and riches of virtue, deprived of the spiritual and supernatural life of divine grace, and condemned to lose God and his glory for a never ending eternity? Is it not just that they, who thus have been the cause of the damnation of others, should likewise be the eternal companions of their misery? Is it not just that as they were instrumental to their perdition, and dug a pit for them to fall into it, as the royal prophet speaks, Ps. xlix. they should also become partakers of their punishment for ever in hell? Hence it is that the Gospel thunders out so many dreadful woes against the man or woman by whom scandal cometh, and declares that it were better for them that a millstone were hanged about their necks, and that they were drowned in the depth of the sea, Mat. xviii. Unhappy therefore is the man or woman who is the cause of scandal; but doubly unhappy is he who gives scandal when he is particularly obliged to give good example. This is what I promised to show ye in the second point.

It is the duty of every Christian to be zealous for the honour of God, and to contribute, according to his ability, to the welfare and happiness of his neighbour. Our conversation and behaviour in every incident of life ought to be a constant lesson of virtue to all around us, for as the Scripture says, *God has given to each of us a charge of our neighbour*, and this charge is executed by pursuing a line of conduct which may be a continual edification to him, and by giving him an example of those virtues which may attract him into the paths of truth and justice, and bring eternal salvation to his soul. Blessed and happy are they who make the light of their good example shine thus before men, and who instruct many to justice. They shall shine like stars before the throne of God for perpetual eternities, as the prophet Daniel says, and they shall receive an additional degree of glory in Heaven, in proportion to the good that will be done on earth through their

means, and the greater number of souls that will be converted and gained over to the Lord by their salutary advice, good counsel and edifying example. On the contrary, unhappy are they who tempt, encourage, corrupt, seduce and incite others to vice by their scandalous example or impious conversation. They must be accountable to the Divine justice on the last day, not only for their own personal sins, but also for all the crimes of others to which they are accessary. Nay, every sin that will be committed through their means, and every sinner that will be damned through their fault, will bring an additional curse on their criminal heads, and subject them to a more rigorous punishment hereafter. But if scandal, barely considered in itself, be so pernicious, so destructive, and so fatal a crime, what must it be when it is given by those who hold an exalted rank in human society, and who by their office, state and profession, are particularly bound to give good example, and to edify others under their care, such as the pastors of the church with regard to their respective flocks; ecclesiastics with regard to the faithful in general; christians and catholics with regard to their separated brethren of a different persuasion; superiors with regard to their subjects; masters and mistresses with regard to their servants, domestics and apprentices; fathers and mothers with regard to their children? For if the Gospel pronounces a dreadful woe to that man or woman, by whom scandal cometh, Mat. c. xviii. surely a double woe, a double malediction, and a double punishment must be reserved for those who, by God's appointment, are under a special obligation bound to contribute to the edification and salvation of others, when they are the very first to scandalize them; because, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, the sin of scandal is then more contagious; it makes a deeper impression on the soul it affects; it is more difficult for one to defend himself against it, and impiety draws from hence a greater advantage. How criminal, then, must those nominal and half Christians be, who, by the pagan lives they lead, disgrace the Christian name, dishonour the sacred character they bear, bring unjust aspersions on the faith they profess, and hinder the conversion of numbers of well disposed souls by the scandalous example they constantly give both at home and abroad? How criminal must those wicked Catholics be who, by their immoralities and licentiousness, hurt the cause of religion very materially, and draw bitter reproaches on the Church, whereof they are refractory members? How criminal must those fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses, and heads of families be, whose words and actions from morning till night are continual lessons of impiety, of irreligion, of drunkenness, of blasphemy, of execrations and other horrid vices, for their unfortunate children and domestics? How criminal, in fine, must those scoffers, mockers and jibers be, who seem to glory and take a singular

pleasure in running down fasts and abstinences, in turning devotion into ridicule, in laughing at those who are addicted to it, and making a jest of practices of piety and religion, as if they envied the spiritual good of others, and wished to give them a dislike to the service of God, and alienate their minds from the observance of the common duties of Christianity? Did such people but seriously reflect what mischief they do, what scandal they give, what a dreadful havoc of souls they cause, and what numbers they have perhaps been the means of already plunging into the flames of hell, it would be almost enough to cast them into despair. Alas! every soul that is lost by their means, and through their fault, will rise up in judgment against them on the last day, and cry out to Heaven for vengeance with a louder voice than the blood of Abel formerly cried out to Heaven for vengeance against Cain the murderer. The Almighty himself solemnly declares, through the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel, c. iii. that he will then demand satisfaction from the authors of their ruin, and require their blood at the hands of their spiritual murderers. *I will require his blood at thy hand*, says the sacred text.

And really, fathers and mothers, and heads of families, who instead of being guardians and protectors of the innocence and virtue of their children and domestics, do away their good natural dispositions, and transmit their own vices to them, by the force of bad example, are in some respect more criminal than those barbarians who are said to have sacrificed their infants to their idols, or than Herod, who massacred the holy innocents; it being less cruel to plunge a dagger into a child's heart, and to deprive him of a mortal life, which otherwise would shortly have an end, than to deprive him of a spiritual life of sanctifying grace, and entail eternal ruin and damnation on both his soul and body. For this reason, St. Thomas of Villanova says, that of the two evils, he would rather choose to be responsible to God, on the last day, for the murder of a hundred bodies, than for the spiritual murder and damnation of one single soul. It is your indispensable duty, O parents and heads of families in particular, to give your children no other example but what they may safely follow without offending the Lord their God. Ye should not suffer them to be witnesses to any thing but what may contribute to inspire them with an aversion to sin, and a love of virtue. Ye should be cautious, even to a nicety, what ye either say or do in their presence, since the example that is set before them in their youth carries much weight with it, and has the greatest influence imaginable upon their ductile minds. When from their early days, they observe nothing in the conduct of their parents but what is virtuous, they are gradually formed to the same good habits, and the virtues of their parents become for them the seeds of everlasting happiness; but if the lives of their parents be vicious and disorderly, debauched and irreligi-

gious, their spirit of irreligion and impiety will not rest with themselves, but will descend, like an inheritance to their children, who are naturally inclined to imitate their parents, as they have their example constantly before their eyes. How can it be expected that they will lead a spotless and untainted life in the midst of corruption, in the midst of debauchery, in the midst of drunkenness, of quarrelling, fighting, cursing, swearing and blaspheming? It is a well known truth that vice is catching, and that evil communication is apt to corrupt even good manners, as the Apostle observes: The best education, the most virtuous dispositions, the strongest resolutions, are hardly sufficient to hold out against it. Such is the force and seduction of bad example, bad company, bad connexions, that the infection is readily taken, the poison is insensibly imbibed, and the very principles of religion are easily stifled in the tender breasts of unthinking and unguarded children, especially when their parents authorize vice and discourage virtue by their words and actions, and lead such disorderly lives that their houses may be said to resemble so many schools of the devil. Wo, and double wo to such unhappy parents and heads of families who scandalize their children and domestics in this manner and diffuse the contagion of their vices from generation to generation! Wo, in fine, to every man or woman by whom scandal doth come: *It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea, than to scandalize one of those little ones who believe in me*, says Christ, in ch. xviii. of St. Matthew, v. 6.

It is the general opinion of divines, that a word or action, which of its own nature is only a venial sin, becomes a grievous mortal sin when it occasions great scandal, and that it is the more grievous as the number of the persons scandalized is greater; yet how few sinners acknowledge themselves guilty of this crime? They seldom think of accusing themselves of it, even at the sacred tribunal of penance, although it can never be pardoned without a true repentance, and without repairing the mischief thereby occasioned; for as they who have unjustly invaded their neighbour's property, or blackened his character by calumny or detraction, are indispensably bound to repair, to the extent of their power, the injury they have done, if they ever expect pardon from God, so, in like manner, the authors and causes of scandal are indispensably obliged to repair, to the best of their power, the scandal they have occasioned; they are to remove the occasion of scandal, and make the best satisfaction they are able for the injury they have done to the cause of virtue. They are to put up their fervent prayers and supplications for the conversion of those whom they have unhappily caused to make a shipwreck of their innocence, and to edify them by the example of such virtues as may invite them to return to the paths of justice. But how shall they be able to discharge

this obligation, if the souls which they have scandalized and led astray be already departed out of this world in their sins, and doomed to endless misery? In this case, it is evident, that a perfect reparation of the scandal is impossible, since all the penitential rigours they can practice, and all the tears they are able to shed, would not be sufficient to extinguish the flames of fire, or mitigate the torments that these unhappy souls are to endure for ever in hell. This is another aggravation of the sin of scandal. King David was so sensible of this that he did public penance all the days of his life for the public scandal he had given to his people. As he knew that the knowledge of his crimes was to reach to the latest posterity, he was willing that all future ages should be convinced of the reparation he made for the scandal he had given; he therefore did not cease beseeching the Lord to cleanse his soul from his hidden sins, and from the sins of others to which he had been accessary in any shape whatever. Where are such public penitents to be seen now a-days, though the world abounds with public scandalous sinners? May I not then conclude with Jesus Christ in the Gospel, and say, *Wo to the world for its scandals*, since though nothing is more common than scandal, nothing is more rare than the reparation of it, and still no obligation is more indispensable?

Let us, therefore, my brethren, beware of giving scandal to others, and at the same time let us guard against being scandalized by them. Let us make the purity of our faith shine by the purity of our morals and prove by our exemplary lives that true piety has not entirely forsaken the earth. Let us testify, by our edifying conduct, that there are still good Christians and Catholics to be found who respect and honour religion, and who are not to be shaken in their principles, nor drawn from the paths of virtue by the deplorable scandals which of late years have overspread a considerable portion of the Christian world.

O divine Jesus, sanctify thy church, which thou hast purchased with thy precious blood! Remove from her all scandals, schisms and abuses! Open the eyes of those who are straying away from the road of salvation! Enlighten them with the bright rays of thy divine grace, that they may see, renounce and detest their errors! Inspire us all with a proper sense of our duty; and grant that we may faithfully comply with it, to thy greater honour and glory, to the edification of our neighbour, and to the eternal salvation of our own souls; which is the happiness I wish ye all. *Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

On the Virtue of Humility.

Tu quis es? S. Jo. c. i. v. 19.

They said to him, Who art thou? St. John, c. i. v. 19.

THE Gospel of this day represents St. John the Baptist baptizing on the borders of the river Jordan, and edifying all Judea by the sanctity of his life, the splendor of his doctrine, and the lustre of his shining virtues. The Jews were so much astonished at his unparalleled austerities, and conceived so high an esteem and veneration for him, that they concluded he was the promised Messias. Hence the Sanhedrim or Grand Council of Jerusalem deputed a solemn embassy to him, to know from his own mouth if he really was the Messias foretold by the Prophets, and impatiently longed for by their whole nation. The question which the Priests and Levites, deputed on this occasion, put to him, was, *Tu quis es? Who art thou?* This is a question which we should frequently put to ourselves, in order to acquire a true knowledge of what we really are; for as the ignorance of ourselves is the source of pride and vanity, so a true knowledge of ourselves is a powerful counterpoise that balances the soul and brings her down to a just pitch of christian humility. The very Pagans themselves looked upon the knowledge of one's own self as the fundamental principle of true philosophy, and regarded these two words, *Nosce teipsum, Know thyself*, as a lesson sent down from Heaven; for which reason they had it inscribed in golden letters on the gates of the temple of Apollo. They were of opinion that no study was more noble or more worthy of man than man himself; and that the first use he should make of his reason was to attain a perfect knowledge of his own nature. Without this knowledge of ourselves every other science is but a vain curiosity, that fills men with presumption and self-conceit, and banishes the Holy Ghost with his gifts out of their souls.—However, this knowledge of ourselves must be improved and perfected by a knowledge of God, and an attentive contemplation of his infinite perfections, that we may thereby be penetrated with a more feeling sense of our own emptiness, and excited, to a more grateful acknowledgment of his mercy and goodness; for the more we contemplate the grandeur and perfection of God's Infinite Majesty, the more shall we sink and drown ourselves in the abyss of our own nothingness, and be convinced that all honour and glory belong to God alone.—It was a perfect knowledge of himself that made St. John the Baptist so little and so despicable in his own eyes. His virtue was put to the test by the question proposed to him by the Jewish Priests and Levites. He might have easily taken an

advantage of their mistaken notion, and by one single word induced the whole Synagogue to embrace him with open arms. But his humility would not suffer him to pretend to any merit, or aspire to any dignity that was not due to him. The low and contemptible opinion he had of his own insufficiency made him forget all his high prerogatives, and appear in his own eyes a mere empty nothing, not even worthy to untie the latchet of Christ's shoes, or to render him the least or the lowest service. *I am*, said he, *but the voice of one crying in the desert*. I am no more than an empty sound in the air that vanishes away like smoke. I am next to nothing, or but one degree from it. Behold here, my brethren, a perfect model of humility for ye to copy after; if ye aspire to a happy union with your blessed Redeemer Jesus Christ, and wish to engage him to take possession of your souls at this holy time. It is in vain for you to expect that you will attain to this happiness without the virtue of humility, as it is only on the meek and humble that he bestows his gracious favours and blessings.—The design of the following discourse, therefore, is to excite ye to the love and practice of this amiable virtue, by briefly laying before ye the motives and advantages that should persuade you to be truly humble. Nothing is more just, nothing more reasonable than that we should be profoundly humble both in spirit and in heart. This is the subject of the first point.—Nothing is more acceptable to God, or more necessary to our salvation, than that we should be profoundly humble. This is the subject of the second point.—Let us humbly implore the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her as usual in the words of the Angel.—*Ave, &c.*

Divines distinguish two kinds of humility; the one of the spirit and understanding, the other of the heart and will. Humility of the spirit and understanding makes us know and acknowledge that of ourselves we are nothing, and that we owe all that we have to God's pure bounty. It does not consist, as is generally imagined, in placing ourselves beneath what we are in reality, but in doing ourselves the exactest and strictest justice, and in clearly seeing and knowing our own indigence and miseries. Humility of the heart and will is founded in a feeling sense, and an experimental knowledge of our own weakness. It makes us sincerely despise ourselves in our hearts, and willing to be despised by others, from a conviction that we are deserving of contempt. How few Christians will you find who are habitually in this interior disposition? How few are there who continually carry in their heart this intimate conviction of their own insufficiency and unworthiness? There is nothing in which we more frequently deceive ourselves. We all believe, with a speculative faith, that all creatures are nothing of themselves, and that all glory should be given to God alone; but in practice we do not conform our sentiments with this belief,

por glorify God in reality. Few comprehend rightly what humility is. *Many grasp at the shadow*, says St. Jerome, *few embrace the substance of humility*. Many are humble in their words and in their exterior conduct, but inwardly are the dupes of a subtle refined pride, which they artfully disguise and conceal under the mask of an apparent humility, and the cloak of a feigned affected modesty. The humility of most people goes no farther than their understanding. It does not reach their heart and affection. Yet humility of the understanding will avail them little without humility of the heart and will.—The Devils themselves understand and know full well their own baseness, abjection and indignity, but they want humility of heart and will. True christian humility, says St. Bernard, resides partly in the understanding, and partly in the will. It is a virtue, says this holy Doctor, by which a man, from a true knowledge of himself, is contemptible in his own eyes.—It springs from a true knowledge of our own infirmities and imperfections, and makes us under-value the judgments of men, and disregard the empty praises and applauses of the world. There is an infused humility, which is obtained chiefly through the channel of contemplation, and devout, humble prayer; and there is an acquired humility, which is attained by repeated acts of humiliation. Infused humility enlightens the soul in all her views, and makes her clearly see and feel her own absolute indigence. One ray of this heavenly light discovers to us our own nothingness much better than all our study and reflections on ourselves can do, as one ray of the sun enlightens the earth much better than all the stars together. St. Bernard, speaking of acquired humility, says in his 87th Epist. *that if we do not exercise humiliations we cannot attain to humility; for humiliation is the road to humility, and produces it, as meekness in suffering tribulations and injuries produces patience*. In effect, we shall find many pressing motives and inducements to embrace all kinds of humiliations and abjections, as due to us, if we do but take a close view of ourselves, and attentively consider, with St. Bernard, what we have been, what we are by nature, what we are become by sin, what we should be by co-operating with God's grace, and what kind of beings we are to be hereafter, when death shall reduce us to dust and ashes. Everything preaches humility to us on the one hand, and gratitude to our Creator on the other. He alone is the origin, the term and the centre of all that is good, and consequently all honour, praise and glory are due to him alone; we owe all to him, and have nothing of ourselves, or of our own stock, but ignorance and weakness, misery and sin. Of our own nature we are the very abstract of frailty, and an unfathomed abyss of corruption, capable of nothing when left to ourselves, but of rushing headlong into all kind of disorders. All the good qualities that we may perhaps be supposed to have, whether of nature or grace, are the pure gifts of God, and the immediate effects

of his goodness. They are talents deposited in our hands, to be improved and employed for his greater honour and glory, and with a pure intention of pleasing him, and doing his holy will in all things. And since *much will be required of those to whom much has been given*, as the Gospel assures us, the more favours we have received from Heaven the more we should tremble at the thoughts of the rigorous account we must give of our stewardship on the last day, and the more we should humble ourselves in the centre of our own nothingness, at the view of our indigence and unworthiness. Among the many motives which should lead us to humility, let us but attentively consider what kind of being man is: *Man born of a woman, lives but a short time, suffers much, and has many miseries entailed on him.* This is the picture which holy Job draws of mankind; and the Apostle, for this reason, justly concludes and says, that *if any man seems to himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* Alas! we are indeed nothing of ourselves. Many ages have passed over before we had even an existence, or any thing else; and we would still remain in our primitive nothingness, had not the Almighty been pleased to extract us from nothing and to give us a being. And though we now exist by his Almighty power, we would every moment fall into our original nothingness, were we not every moment preserved and supported by his powerful hand. The several advantages of wit, learning, beauty, courage, and the like, are the pure gifts of his liberality, without any merit or right on our part that could entitle us to any of them; for as we had no right to existence, we had consequently no right to any thing that supposes a being. All then that we now possess is a mere gratuity, for which we are indebted to our bountiful Creator; so that we cannot without the greatest injustice, cast an eye of complacency on ourselves, since we have nothing of our own; nothing but sin. This indeed, and this alone we can call our own. Whatever we have, beyond sin and nothingness, is a gift of our Maker, who as St. Augustine speaks, crowns his own gifts when he crowns the good works that his grace enables us to perform. O, what a subject of profound humiliation, is this for us! Of ourselves we are nothing but poor, vile miserable sinners, subject to many vices, imperfections and unruly passions. We have sinned against heaven and earth; we have offended the infinite Majesty of God; we have deserved the torments of hell-fire; we have deserved the thunderbolts of Heaven; we have therefore deserved to be despised by all creatures, and to be trampled upon by merciless devils for an endless eternity.

What can be more humbling? What pride can hold out against this reflection? We are sure that we have offended the Lord our God, and we are not sure that we have as yet obtained the happy remission of our sins, because we are not sure that our sorrow for them has had all the qualities that are

necessary to entitle us to the benefit of divine mercy, or that our penance has been proportioned to the greatness of our offences, and sufficient to appease and disarm the justice of an offended Deity. We march incessantly towards the grave, uncertain what will be our lot in the other world. Should not this dreadful uncertainty alarm us, and make us profoundly humble? We know that at the moment of our death an eternity of happiness or an eternity of misery must inevitably be our fate; and we can have no certainty in this world which of the two will certainly fall to our lot, as no one here on earth, without a special revelation, can know whether he be worthy of love or of hatred. Nay, though we were even assured that our past sins were all forgiven; though we were assured, of being at present in the state of grace, still we can have no manner of assurance that we shall not relapse, and die in a state of reprobation. We can have no assurance that we shall persevere, unto the end of our lives, in the love and friendship of God, amidst the many dangerous occasions of sin that surround us, and the various snares of the enemy that are laid on all sides, to surprise and draw us into vice. We are not stronger than Sampson, who fell a victim to his passions, as St. Jerome remarks; we are not wiser than Solomon, who at length became an idolater; we are not more holy than King David, who by one unguarded glance of his eyes was led into murder and adultery; we are not more perfect than Peter the Apostle, who denied his Master three different times. We are not more zealous for the interests of religion than Tertullian and Origen, who in the end fell into different errors, and died separated from the communion of the Holy Catholic Church. The downfall of these great men alarmed the Saints themselves, and made them tremble for their own salvation, though their conscience reproached them with no mortal crime. St. Paul, that great vessel of election, though he had been carried up to the third Heaven, and had converted many nations to the faith of Jesus Christ, still dreaded, lest whilst he preached to others, and laboured for their salvation, he might be reprov'd himself and eternally lost. St. Jerome, in a desert, where he joined to a great purity of life the most rigorous practices of penance and mortification, lived under such continual apprehensions for his salvation, that he constantly imagined he heard the last trumpet sounding these words in his ears: *Arise ye dead, come to judgment!* How great then must our presumption and blindness be, if we suffer pride to reign in our hearts or in our minds, since there is no ministry so holy, no state of life so perfect, in which a Christian is not exposed to the danger of falling into sin, losing God's grace, and perishing eternally!

There can be no security here on earth, says St. Bernard, after the first Angel has been lost in Heaven, the first man lost in Paradise, and Judas the Apostle lost in the school of

Jesus Christ. The predestination of men is a hidden mystery to us, and of which we are not to judge by our present disposition. How good soever you may be, you may still change, and alas ! to change no more for all eternity. How good soever you may be, you have still reason to fear both for your inconstancy in the practice of virtue, and for your future obstinacy in sin. Far, then, from despising other sinners, or judging such a man, for example, to be wicked, and yourself to be virtuous, you are to entertain a quite different opinion, and think that this man, whom you proudly despise, may perhaps be of the number of the elect, and you of the number of the reprobate. It may happen that he falls into sins this day, to rise from them to-morrow ; and you may happen to fall to-morrow, never to rise any more. God, perhaps, has destined him to be a model of penance, and you to be an example of terror to all presumptuous souls.

After all these considerations, my brethren, how deplorable must our insensibility be, if we entertain any sentiments of pride or vain-glory, or haughtily prefer ourselves in word or in thought even to the greatest sinner on earth ? Ye have now heard the reasons for asserting, that nothing is more reasonable or more just than that we should be profoundly humble. It remains yet to prove, that nothing is more pleasing to God, or more necessary to our salvation, than that we should be humble. It is what I promised to shew ye in my second point.

Do but open the sacred volumes, and you will be convinced of the malice and pernicious effects of pride, and of the benefits and salutary effects of humility. You will acknowledge that nothing is more pleasing to God, or more essential to the character of a Christian, than humility. By it Christianity begun ; by it it has been established ; and on it it is founded. Humility is the first example that our Blessed Saviour has given us, the first lesson he has taught us, the favourite virtue of his whole life, the most constant maxim of his law ; nay, the whole substance of his doctrine, and of all the morality of the Gospel. His whole life, says St. Augustine, was a chain of virtues, and one continued series of good works ; but from the time of his nativity in the stable of Bethlehem, unto the hour of his death on Mount Calvary, he proposed humility in a special manner for our imitation : he took human flesh, for our sake, in the womb of an humble virgin ; he passed his whole life under all the disadvantages and humiliations of poverty and indigence ; and in the end, he humbled himself unto death, even unto the ignominious death of the cross.— This made the devout St. Bernard say, O humility, humility ! how precious, how amiable, and how dear shouldst thou be to us after such an example, since the eternal Son of the living God was pleased to be incarnated with thee, and to expire in thy arms on a cross !

Nothing gains so much on the Almighty God, or renders us

more acceptable in his sight. It was humility that rendered the blessed Virgin Mary so acceptable in the sight of the most holy Trinity, and raised her to the eminent dignity of the mother of Jesus Christ; nay, St. Bernard says, that her virginal chastity would have availed her but little without humility, chastity and charity being commonly the price and recompence of profound humility. Hence it is that she attributes to her humility alone all the signal favours and blessings that were bestowed upon her, preferably to all other creatures, as appears from her own canticle of praise and thanksgiving, wherein she expressly says, *Because the Lord has regarded the humility of his handmaid, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.* It was this virtue that crowned all the other virtues of St. John the Baptist, and rendered him so great a favourite of Heaven. All the high prerogatives by which he was distinguished sprung from his humility. In it all the perfections and graces that were endowed with were founded. His soul being truly humble, he was in his own eyes a mere nothing. Wherefore, by humbling himself so low, he deserved to be exalted so high, that Christ himself vouchsafed to preach his panegyric, and to honour him with the most noble character that was ever given to any man, having declared in the Gospel, that *among the born of women there had not risen one greater than John the Baptist.* St. Mat. xi. 11. So true it is that *he who humbles himself shall be exalted*, as on the contrary *he that exalts himself shall be humbled.*

Without humility the other means of salvation become useless and unprofitable. It is from it that prayer, which is the ordinary means to obtain God's grace, derives its virtue and efficacy. Penance which is the last resource of the sinner, can have no force unless his heart be humbled and touched with a profound sentiment of his own unworthiness, and the idea of the Sovereign Majesty of an offended Deity. But if you are profoundly humble, if you are a sincere humble penitent, and earnestly sue for grace and mercy, though your sins were as numerous as grains of sand in the sea, they will be all forgiven; for God can refuse no favour, when true humility petitions for it. He retires from the proud, and stoops to the humble, as St. Augustine speaks. He resists the one, and gives his grace in abundance to the other. We have a remarkable instance hereof in the proud Pharisee and the humble Publican, mentioned in the Gospel. The presuming Saint was despised and rejected, with all the glittering show of his apparent virtues and good works, whilst the humble sinner became acceptable, and was embraced with all his vices. Why so? because, as St. John Chrysostom observes, the virtues of the one were accompanied with pride, and the vices of the other were attended with humility. Such, my brethren, is the wonderful force and efficacy of humility, that in one moment it can make a reprobate a Saint, as, on the contrary, pride can in one moment make a just man a reprobate. How odious,

then, must pride be in the sight of God, and how amiable, how necessary must humility be? Without it no virtue can be acceptable. Without it the whole fabric of a spiritual life must inevitably fall to the ground, for it is the basis and foundation of every virtue, and the corner stone of the spiritual edifice. He that does not build upon it builds upon sand, and whatever may appear to be virtue is no more than a shadow, than a chimera, than a phantom, than a false and imaginary virtue, unless it be preceded, accompanied, and followed by humility; for the grace of God, from whence every true virtue proceeds, is only given to the humble, and does not descend into a proud soul. St. Cyprian calls humility, therefore, the root of all virtues, and the gate of Religion. St. Jerome calls it the first virtue of a Christian; and St. John Chrysostom says, it is impossible to rise to the higher degrees of perfection without passing first through the lower, which consist in humility. This made the learned and pious Cassian say, that a Christian's progress in humility is the measure of his progress in every other virtue; that is as much as he advances, in humility, so much does he advance in real virtue and perfection, and no further. St. Augustine, for the same reason, compares Christian perfection to a grand and stately edifice, which rises high in proportion as the foundation is laid low; so that virtue always increases in proportion to our humility. The same holy Doctor goes farther, in his 56th epistle, where he proposes and answers the following questions: What is the first thing in all religion? humility. What is the second? humility. What is the third? humility? There is no other road to the kingdom of Heaven, for as the sin of pride is the road to hell, the contrary virtue of humility must necessarily be the road to Heaven. Pride was the first cause of our ruin, and the general source of all our disorders; therefore, by a wise disposition of Providence, humility became a necessary means of salvation, and an effectual antidote for curing our maladies. It was by pride the first fallen Angel lost the glory of Heaven; and the first man forfeited his original innocence and sanctity by vainly desiring to raise and exalt himself so as to be like unto God, or to equal him in point of the knowledge of good and evil. Wherefore, if we wish to arrive one day in the kingdom of Heaven, we must necessarily take a road quite different from that by which the apostate Angels and our first parents have been led astray. We must, in a word, renounce and shun pride, and embrace the opposite virtue of humility. This is the first and principal means which the Redeemer of the world chose for recalling lost mankind to a sense of their duty; this is the sovereign remedy which he wisely prescribed for healing our spiritual disorders. The indispensable necessity of practising it is founded on the very spirit and profession of Christianity, as it is by it we begin to be Christians, and to partake of the fruits of our redemption. In vain do we pre-

tend to be disciples of Jesus Christ, unless we learn from him to be meek and humble of heart : In vain do we expect to be of the number of his elect, and to inherit his heavenly kingdom, unless we bear some resemblance of him, since as the apostle teaches us, Rom. viii. 29, those who are predestinated to be of the number of God's elect must be made conformable to the image of his Son. This plainly shews that without humility we cannot hope to be saved and exalted to the kingdom of Heaven. Hence it is that when a dispute arose among the disciples which of them was the greatest, Christ our Lord, to correct their pride, and to convince them of the indispensable necessity of humility, called a little child to him, as we read in ch. xviii. of St. Matthew, and placing it in the midst of them, he solemnly declared and said, *Amen, I say unto you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* Here he excepts no state, rank, or condition, but requires us all to bear a resemblance of little children, in order to be qualified for admittance into Heaven.— And that this is a resemblance in point of humility, appears clearly from the following words, which he immediately adds : *Whoever then shall humble himself like this little child, he shall be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.* Should we not therefore conclude, my brethren, that nothing is more reasonable, nothing more just, nothing more necessary, than that we should be profoundly humble both in spirit and heart, both our duty and our interest require it. Let us then neglect no opportunity of practising this amiable virtue. Let us frequently and earnestly beg it of God, the giver of all good gifts, crying out to him in the words of the humble Augustine, *O Lord teach me to know thee, and to know myself : To know thee, that I may love and glorify thee alone in all things ; and to know myself, that I may never secretly confide in, or ascribe any thing to myself, or to my own merit.* O divine Redeemer, thou perfect mirror of humility, grant we may learn from thee to be meek and humble of heart, and that, after humbling ourselves here on earth, we may be one day exalted to the sacred mansions of bliss, which thou hast prepared for those who are truly humble ; and which I sincerely wish you all, in the name, &c. *Amen,*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

On Preparing the Way of the Lord.

Parate viam Domini, rectas facite semitas ejus.—*Luc. c. iii. v. 4.*

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.—Luke, c. iii. v. iv.

THE Holy Catholic Church, ever solicitous for the eternal salvation of her children, endeavours during the whole time of Advent, to prepare them for a worthy reception of their Divine Redeemer, on the happy day of his Nativity. It was for this end that the holy time of Advent was originally instituted, and fasted, in former ages, like the forty days of Lent, which custom is still observed by some religious orders. On the first Sunday of Advent, the terrors of the last and general judgment are laid before us in the Gospel, that the fear of God's severe justice may rouse and frighten those sinners to a speedy repentance, who are not to be drawn to a proper sense of their duty by the sweet attractive of divine love. On the second, third and fourth Sundays of Advent, the Gospel reminds us of the sufferings, the penitential austerities and preachings of St. John the Baptist, and represents that glorious forerunner of the world's Redeemer coming forth from the desert, holding up to our view a perfect mirror of the most profound humility, and zealously preaching on the borders of the river Jordan, the baptism of penance for the remission of sins. The important lesson which he there announced to the Jews of his days, cannot be inculcated too frequently. It regards the Christians of our days no less than it regarded the ancient Jews, and is equally addressed to men of every age and nation; for as the Son of God descended from the Heavens for the salvation of all men, it is the indispensable duty of all to prepare and dispose themselves for receiving him worthily, that they may reap the signal advantages and fruits of his Advent, or coming into the world. Lest we should forget so essential a duty, the same pathetic exhortation, the same sacred voice which echoed formerly on the banks of the Jordan, and in the deserts of Jericho, is repeatedly sounded in our ears, and proclaimed from the altars and pulpits during this holy time. *Prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight his paths.*

The scripture distinguishes four different Advents, or Comings of Jesus Christ, two of which are visible, and two invisible. His first coming was, when he manifested himself in human flesh, and came to redeem the world. His second coming will be, when he shall descend from Heaven on the last day with great power and majesty, to judge the world.—

The third coming is, when he comes to visit the soul of a just man, and to inhabit it by his holy spirit and sanctifying grace. It is of this coming he speaks in ch. xiv. of St. John, v. 23., where he says, *We will come unto him, and we will take up our dwelling with him.* His fourth coming happens at the hour of death, when he comes to take to himself the souls of those who depart this life in the happy state of grace, and to invite them to partake of the joys of the kingdom of Heaven. Of this coming St. John speaks in ch. xxii. of the Apocalypse, where he cries out with fervour, and says : *Come Lord Jesus, and receive me.* It is also of this coming that the words of the Church are to be understood, when in the recommendation of a departing soul she prays that *Christ Jesus may come forth to meet the dying Christian with a mild and cheerful countenance.*

These four comings of Jesus Christ are represented by the four Sundays of Advent ; and it should be the object of our ardent desires, and devout prayers, during this holy time, that these four comings may be accomplished in our favour by the divine mercy, particularly his spiritual coming into our hearts and souls, by his Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace ; because it is hereby that the redemption and deliverance of our souls from the slavery of sin is fully completed, and the happy reign of divine charity is perfectly established in our hearts. This is a matter of the utmost importance and necessity ; for unless Christ comes to visit us in this manner by his Holy Spirit, and to be, as it were spiritually born in our hearts by his sanctifying grace, it is in vain that he was corporally born for us ; and if we frustrate the designs of his mercy at his first coming in the mystery of the incarnation, we may expect that he will come, at the hour of death, and at the end of the world, not to reward and crown us, but to condemn and punish us for all eternity. To induce ye, then, my brethren, to prepare your hearts for his spiritual birth, and to dispose your souls for partaking of the inestimable blessings of the approaching solemnity of Christmas, is the design of the following discourse ; wherein I will shew ye in what the preparation and dispositions required on your part chiefly consist. In short, I will endeavour to point out the best manner in which ye ought to prepare the way of the Lord, and make straight his paths. Let us first, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The Gospel informs us, that when the time appointed by divine providence for the redemption of mankind was drawing nigh, the great Herald of Heaven, St. John the Baptist, appeared in the deserts of Judea, like a Morning Star, to usher in the Sun of Justice and the Light of the World. He lived there from his childhood, near thirty years, an innocent martyr and spotless victim of the most austere penance, sequestered from the world, conversing only with God and the Angels, having no other house to shelter him from the inclemency

of the weather but a dreary wilderness, nor any other bed to lie on but the bare ground. A few dried locusts and a little wild honey was the only nourishment he allowed his mortified body, and his garments were no other than rough camels hair, or a covering of a species of coarse camlet. Thus clothed with the weeds of penance, and bearing its marks in his body, he at length came forth from his beloved retreat, to enter upon the sacred functions of the high commission on which God had sent him. Unwilling, however, to mix with a depraved world, or entirely to quit his penitential solitude, he began his mission on the confines of his desert, near the banks of the Jordan, preaching with incomparable zeal the baptism of penance for the remission of sins, and crying out with a loud voice, "O *people of Israel*, do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is *at hand*. Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his *paths*. Now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that yields not good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. Every valley shall be filled up; every mountain and hill shall be levelled; crooked ways shall be made straight; rough ways shall be made plain, and all flesh shall see the salvation sent from God."

Thus it was that the Baptist prepared the Jews for the coming of the Messiah. Thus he disposed the world to receive its God and Redeemer, in the wonderful mystery of the incarnation. He was sensible that he could not prepare mankind better, for partaking of the grace of their redemption, than by persuading sinners to renounce their evil ways, and do penance for their sins. He therefore announced to them, both by word and example, the necessity of a sincere repentance, and he had the pleasure to see his labours crowned with wonderful success; for whole shoals of proselytes, flocked to him, from all Judea and the neighbouring countries, *repenting and confessing their sins*, as the Gospel tells us, in order to qualify themselves, by this means, for sharing in the inestimable graces and blessings, which the Saviour of the world brought down with him from Heaven.

Hence it appears my brethren, that the first preparation we are to make at this time, for the reception of Jesus Christ, is to purify our souls by the holy exercises of penance. The indispensable necessity hereof is evident from the words of the Gospel, which expressly calls penance the *Baptism of Penance*, to give us thereby to understand that as baptism is necessary for the remission of original sin, so penance, or repentance, is necessary for the remission of those actual sins by which the grace of God is forfeited after baptism. Nay, the sins, which Christians commit after their baptism, imply so much ingratitude, and so barefaced a contempt of the divine goodness, that as the Council of Trent observes, the grace of baptism, unhappily forfeited by mortal sin, is not to be recovered, without much labour and many penitential tears. It is for this rea-

son that the Holy Fathers call penance a *Laborious Baptism*, and the second plank after spiritual shipwreck.

Christ himself has declared the necessity of penance in terms so clear, as to preclude every possibility of a doubt, saying, *Unless ye do penance ye shall all perish*; and St. Luke plainly indicates its wonderful power and efficacy when he styles it, *the Baptism of Penance*. When it is true and sincere, it effaces and does away all kind of sins, let them be ever so grievous, ever so numerous. It levels the highest mountains of human pride, It fills up every valley; that is, it repairs every loss, every void that sin occasioned in the soul. It rectifies what was wrong, makes straight what was crooked, and smooths what seemed before rough and difficult to corrupt nature. It removes every obstacle, renders the yoke of Christ sweet and light, and makes a true Gospel Penitent experience more real comfort, inward content, and solid joy, in his tears, self-denials, and other penitential exercises, than worldlings do in their feasting, diversions, and criminal pleasures, as St. Augustine remarks, when he says, *that the penitential tears of devotion are sweeter than the joys of theatres*. In short a true and sincere repentance is not only a necessary disposition, but likewise a most effectual means to avert the wrath, and draw down the blessings of Heaven, and to engage the Son of God to take possession of our souls by his Holy Spirit, and to be spiritually born in our hearts by his sanctifying grace, on the approaching festival of his Nativity.

To render this truth still more plain and intelligible, it is to be observed that divines distinguish a three-fold Nativity of the Son of God, and it is in honour hereof that three distinct masses are appointed by the Church to be celebrated on Christmas day. The first is his eternal nativity, or divine generation, by which he proceeded from the father from all eternity. The second is his temporal nativity, or human generation, by which he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary, in the plenitude of time. The third is his spiritual nativity, by which he is, as it were, born in a spiritual manner in the hearts and souls of the faithful, by the communication of his holy spirit, and the infusion of his sanctifying grace. The first and second Nativity are entirely independent of us, but his Spiritual Nativity depends on our co-operation, and requires certain conditions and dispositions on our part, as it happens within us. The first condition is to cleanse the heart and purify the soul from the filth of sin, that it may become a fit abode for his reception and residence; for it is not to be supposed that he will accept of a heart defiled with iniquity, enter into a criminal soul, or dwell in a body that is subject to sin. A clean heart is the chief object of his complacency, the most agreeable present we can offer him, and the dwelling place he seeks and demands of us at this holy time. It is the most powerful attractive of his gracious favours, and the surest way to enjoy his divine presence, and to engage him to come and

take a permanent possession of our souls. Hence it is, that he calls on us, in the book of Proverbs, in these affectionate terms: *My child give me thy heart*; and again, in c. v. of St. Matthew, he pronounces the *clean of heart blessed and happy*, because *they shall see and enjoy God*. They shall be replenished with the treasures of his grace here, and with the riches of his glory hereafter. This made the royal prophet beseech the Lord most fervently to *create in him a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within his bowels*. This made him cry out with confidence, and say, *A contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*. A heart thus disposed is a most acceptable holocaust; a most agreeable sacrifice, that reaches the throne of God, in the odour of sweetness, and is much more pleasing in his sight than any outward victims or exterior humiliations of the body.

If we, therefore, aspire to a happy union with Jesus Christ, and wish to prepare in ourselves a worthy mansion for him at this holy time, we must, before all things purify our hearts and souls, and carefully wash off all the foul stains of sin with the salutary waters of penance. We must purge out the old leaven, and remove all that in us is disgusting and offensive to the all-seeing eyes of his divine Majesty. We must subdue our passions, and renounce those darling vices which we have blindly erected, like so many idols, on the altar of our hearts. We must, as the Gospel says, *lay the axe to the root*. We must look into all the secret recesses of our conscience, and probe all the sores and wounds of our souls, until we have discovered every latent inordinate affection, and dislodged every vicious disorder that may happen to be lurking therein. If we fail in this point, all we do will be to little purpose; for our hearts and souls cannot become the abode and temple of him who is sanctity itself, as long as they are infected with criminal affections, enslaved by unruly passions, or defiled with one single mortal sin.

The heart, which is averted from the creator, and converted to the creature by sin, must be averted from the creature, and converted to the creator by inward compunction; for the heart alone is the seat of a true repentance, as it is the seat of love. It must be truly changed and effectually turned from the irregular love of the world, and of its sinful pleasures, to the love of God, who is the fountain of all goodness. It must prefer him, and value his friendship above whatever else is nearest and dearest to it on earth. It must hate and detest sin, not only because it is prejudicial to the sinner, and renders him liable to everlasting torments of hell-fire, but because it is displeasing and offensive to God's infinite goodness. Without this conversion or change of the heart there can be no true repentance, for which reason the Holy Ghost exhorts *prevaricators to return to their hearts, to be converted in their whole heart, to form to themselves a new heart and a new spirit, to rend*

their hearts and not their garments, to cast off the works of darkness and to become a new creature.

This is the very essence of a Christian life, though, alas! but little understood, and still less attended to by the generality of modern penitents, who are so apt to be deluded and deceived in this point by outward appearances, that they imagine themselves to be very penitent, provided they shed a few tears, vent a few sighs or moans, or run over, superficially, a few devout acts of contrition, although their hearts remain at the same time unchanged, and still attached to sin. Hence it comes, that there is often great reason to suspect the validity of their past confessions, and to look upon their repentance as imperfect and defective, either for want of that inward compunction of heart, which God requires, or for want of a firm purpose of amendment, and a sincere disposition to avoid the immediate occasions of sin, and repair the injuries they have done; but the Almighty God, who sees the most secret windings of the heart, cannot be deceived or imposed on by lying vows, verbal protestations, or exterior appearances of repentance. He requires us, indeed, to produce *fruits worthy of penance*, and admonishes us, in the Scripture, to manifest our repentance by outwardly *fasting, weeping and mourning*. But then the heart and the interior must be principally attended to; it must be penetrated with a lively sorrow for having offended God, and be firmly determined to offend him no more.

Every true gospel penitent must, like King David, conceive a perfect hatred for sin; he must pursue it home to his inclinations, pluck it up by the root, destroy it from its very foundation, and endeavour to expiate it by satisfactory works of penance. Hence St. Ambrose says, him I call a penitent who both day and night is grieved to the heart for having offended the Lord his God, who abhors the evil he has done, who declares war against his passions, and renounces all sinful pleasures. Him I call a penitent who anticipates the judgment of God by persecuting and punishing sin in himself, according to the measure of its malignity, from a conviction that the penance of a repenting sinner should bear some proportion to the number and enormity of the crimes committed. The penitents of the primitive ages of Christianity, were so fully convinced hereof, that they humbly submitted to the most rigorous austerities, and to the most painful exercises of self-denial and mortification, covering their bodies with sackcloth and ashes, lying prostrate before the church gate, weeping and bewailing their sins in the bitterness of their souls, and fasting three days in the week on bread and water, for the space of three, five, seven, nay, fifteen years successively, for the expiation of a single mortal sin. How far, alas! have the penitents of our days degenerated from their zeal and fervour? They have such an aversion to any penitential exercises, which are mortifying in the least degree, that it is often with difficulty they

are persuaded to recite a few times the penitential psalms, or observe a few fast days, for the expiation of a multitude of horrid mortal sins, which cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance. Notwithstanding it is certain that the justice of the offended Deity must be satisfied either in this life or in the next; either by the voluntary penance of the sinner, or by the vengeance of an angry God, as St. Augustine says.

Since therefore, my brethren, penance is the sole plank of safety which ye have left, after the spiritual shipwreck of your baptismal innocence; since it alone can emancipate ye from the fetters of sin, and the bondage of Satan; since without it ye cannot expect that the Son of God will be spiritually born in your hearts, by his grace and Holy Spirit, let me entreat ye to hearken to the voice of the great Herald of Heaven and Precursor of Jesus Christ, inviting ye at this holy time to do penance for your past offences: *Do penance, says he, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand; prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*

O do not let this time of mercy slip away, like so many Advents which have past without any benefit or advantage to your souls. This may probably be the last Advent that several of ye will ever live to see. Perhaps some of you here present this day are standing on the brink of eternity, and upon the verge of the awful night of death, when it will be out of your power to repent, or to perform any other good work conducive to life everlasting. If ye refuse to lay hold of the mercy which is now offered to ye, if ye slight the precious moments of your visitation, and neglect the powerful and necessary means of salvation, whilst ye are in your health, and capable of having recourse to them, the day, perhaps, may shortly come, when ye will wish for one hour to do penance, and not be able to find it. Ye may, perhaps, cry out in your last illness for the holy sacraments of reconciliation, and be suffered to die without them, as St. Gregory of Nyssa tell us, happened to a certain Catechumen, who having postponed his baptism from time to time, was in the end justly deprived of it, in punishment of his negligence and wilful delays, for he was suddenly taken ill in the midst of a lonesome forest, where he expired, crying out in vain with a loud voice to the trees and mountains to come and baptize him. So true it is, my brethren, that delays are extremely dangerous, particularly when Heaven and eternity are at stake. If any, therefore, amongst ye, be conscious to yourselves that ye are in the unhappy state of mortal sin, let me conjure ye to repent in time, and to shake off the galling yoke of Satan, by a speedy and sincere conversion. Let me beseech ye, with apostolic words, to arise without delay, from the lethargic sleep of sin, and Jesus Christ will enlighten ye with the rays of his grace. Throw yourselves at the feet of his mercy, with a penitential spirit, and in the sincerity of your hearts, and he will stretch forth his all-powerful hand to

break asunder the chains of iniquity, with which ye are fettered, and to relieve ye from the heavy burden with which ye are oppressed. The night of sin is gone before, as the Apostle speaks; the day of salvation is drawing near; the feast of the Nativity of our Lord is at hand; he is coming to make us a visit, and to enrich our souls with his heavenly graces and blessings. He is already striking at the door of our hearts, and suing for a lodging therein. Can we be so ungrateful to him, or so insensible to our eternal welfare, as to refuse him admittance, like unto the people of Bethlehem, who found no room for him in their houses? Can we be so perverse as to reject him, like unto the obstinate Jews, of whom the Scripture speaks: *He came into his own, and his own received him not!* Let us rather yield to the tender solicitations of our Divine Redeemer, and give him our whole heart, cleansed and purified that we may be of the thrice happy number of those, of whom the Gospel says, *To as many as have received him, he has given a power to become the children of God.* Let us copy after the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets, who longed most ardently for his coming. Let us imitate the pious shepherds of Bethlehem, and seek him till we have the happiness to find him. Let us, in fine, invite him into our hearts and souls, by humble and devout prayer, and make him a tender of our best homages, like unto the three Kings of the East. Such are the sentiments, such are the dispositions, which the Church endeavours to excite in her children at present, raising her voice for this purpose with the great St. John the Baptist, and frequently exhorting us all to *prepare the way of the Lord, and to make straight his paths*, that he may possess our hearts and souls here by his grace, and that we may possess him in the kingdom of his glory hereafter.

Grant, O Divine Jesus, that this may be our happy case.— We beseech thee, by that inestimable charity which made thee descend from the highest Heavens for our salvation, to give us the grace of a true and sincere repentance, that we may be qualified to partake of the blessed fruits of thy redemption, and to receive thee worthily into the temple of our souls at the approaching festival of thy Nativity. If thou livest thus in us, and we live in thee, we may hope, with humble confidence, to be replenished with thy celestial benedictions here, and to be admitted hereafter into the kingdom of thy eternal glory, which is the happiness that I sincerely wish ye all, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

On the Incarnation and Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verbum Caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis.—*S. Jo. c. 1, v. 14.*

The Word was made Flesh, and dwell among us.—St. John c. 1, v. 14.

IT is on the present solemnity, if ever, that we have reason to cry out with the Apostle, in his xith chap. to the Romans, *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways !* When the Angels fell from the sacred mansions of bliss by their pride, they were irretrievably lost ; no Redeemer was promised to them ; no remedy was provided for their relief ; no means was granted to them, whereby they might have recovered the grace which they had forfeited. But glory, honour and praise be to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the case was quite different with regard to mankind. Immediately after the fall of our first parents, God most mercifully promised to send a Redeemer, Gen. iii. 15. He vouchsafed to renew this promise from time to time, and gradually disposed all things for the accomplishment of his boundless mercy. However, upwards of four thousand years had elapsed after the creation and fall of Adam, before the promised Redeemer and long-expected Messiah came ; for had man been restored to grace as soon as he had forfeited it, he would not have been sufficiently sensible of the depth of his wounds, nor have had a just feeling of the spiritual blindness, weakness and wretchedness, in which he lay buried under the weight of his guilt ; - neither would the infinite power, wisdom and goodness of God, in providing so effectual a means and so sovereign a remedy for taking away the sins of the world, have appeared so eminently conspicuous.

Mankind, therefore, by a just judgment, was left groveling in the mass of corruption and misery for the space of several ages, and only enjoyed a glimpse of their future redemption, in the promise and expectation of the Messiah and Deliverer who was then to come. It is true, many were saved in the interim by faith and hope in him, God having, from time to time, raised a number of faithful servants, to whom he revealed this mystery ; he was also pleased to choose and reserve to himself a peculiar people, by whom he was known and worshipped ; but almost all the nations of the earth were covered with a deluge of iniquity, and over-run with a multitude of the blackest crimes. The bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt, and

the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, were but faint shadows of the deplorable bondage and captivity in which the infernal Pharaoh held the generality of the unhappy offspring of Adam. From every corner of the world vice cried aloud to heaven for vengeance, and sinful man deserved nothing at the hands of God but eternal damnation and everlasting torments; nevertheless, then it was that the divine mercy superabounded, when sin had thus abounded; then it was that the Heavens were opened and began to flow with honey, as the Church beautifully expresses it in the office of this happy day; then it was that the eternal Son of the eternal God, looking down on us with an eye of pity, descended from the throne of his glory to save forlorn man; then it was, in fine, that the Divine Word *was incarnated for our sake, and came to dwell among us*, poor sinful worms of the earth, in order to become our Redeemer, our Mediator, our Advocate, our Model, our Guide, and the Physician of our souls.

This adorable mystery of his incarnation, above all other mysteries, merits our particular attention, challenges our most profound respect and homage, and should be the principal object of our piety and devotion during the ensuing octave; it is the source of all the other great mysteries and graces of our redemption; in it we behold the incomprehensible power, wisdom, and goodness of our God, displayed to an amazing degree; in it we discover a prodigy of omnipotence, to excite our astonishment, adoration and praise; and a prodigy of love, to kindle in our souls the affections of an ardent love for the Lord our God.—To inspire ye, therefore, with the like tender sentiments, I will endeavour to lay briefly before ye the principal circumstances of this wonderful mystery, and the manner in which it has been accomplished. Let us first implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the blessed Mother of Jesus, saying with the Angel, *Ave Maria, &c.*

The mystery of the Incarnation is to be adored in silent raptures of admiration, rather than to be expressed by words; it is a prodigy that angels and men will admire for all eternity, without being able to fathom it. Here he who is wonderful in all his works, has outdone what creatures could have known to be possible, even to Omnipotence itself, had they not seen it effected and accomplished; but it is for this reason more worthy an infinite God. It is incomprehensible to the spirit of man, and nothing but the Spirit of God could give us a just idea of it. This the inspired Apostle has done, Philip. c. ii. v. 7. when he says, that *God annihilated himself in taking on the form and similitude of a slave*; for what is the incarnation of the Son of God but the most astonishing humiliation of the Deity, but the annihilation of a God, since there is an infinite distance between God, who is an infinite and immense being, and man, who is a mere empty contemptible nothing? In the other mysteries of human redemption, I see nothing after this

that astonishes me so much ; for that a God, made man, has embraced poverty, contempt, sufferings, and death on the cross, was but the consequence, and as it were the engagements of the humanity with which he vested himself ; but that a God of infinite majesty, all God as he is, should make himself man ; that the eternal Son of the eternal Father should strip himself, as it were, of the rays of his glory, clothe his omnipotence with our weakness, shut up his immensity in a little body, and be born in time, under the veil and figure of a child, under the form and similitude of a slave, is something far more wonderful than the creation of the world out of nothing, or the moving the heavens and weighing the universe with a finger.

The holy Scripture speaking of this mystery, not only says that the Son of God became man, but makes use of an expression, which gives us to understand that he chose in man what was most gross and most terrestrial. *The Word was made flesh*, says St. John the Evangelist. That *flesh*, so despicable ; that *flesh*, subject to so many miseries ; that *flesh*, which is common to us with the brute creation, he took on, and rendered it common to himself with us. He made himself like unto us. He espoused our nature. He remained for the space of nine months confined in the bosom of his mother, like other children. He became an infant like unto them, subject to all the humiliations, all the infirmities, and all the weaknesses of that tender age.— O stupendous prodigy ! O astonishing humiliations ! O amazing annihilations of the only begotten Son of God ! how inconceivable are ye ? There is some proportion between man and the smallest insect that crawls on the face of the earth ; but there never was, there never will be, there never can be, the least proportion between God and man. Yet the *Word incarnate* has vouchsafed to humble himself thus for our sake, even to a degree of *annihilation*, and to unite in one and the same person two natures, so different as God and man, the Lord and the servant, the Creator and the creature, the highest and the lowest, all that is great in Heaven with all that is little upon earth. . All other favours and benefits, though great in themselves, appear to be eclipsed by this wonderful condescension of his goodness ; nay, they seem in a manner to lose their value in comparison of this unparalleled instance, this inestimable pledge of his love, it being such, that from it alone we can truly judge to what an excessive degree he loved us, and to what misery sin had unhappily reduced us. Had he not contrived this wonderful expedient to become our Mediator and Redeemer, the gates of Heaven would have remained eternally shut against us, and we would have been lost and undone for ever, no pure creature being capable of repairing the injury, or atoning for the offence committed against the infinite majesty of God by sin, as nothing less was required to cancel it, by an equality of justice, than the merits and humiliations of a person of infinite dignity and value. This made

the Prophet Jeremy cry out and say, chap i. It is owing to the pure mercy of the Lord that we have not been all destroyed and ruined for ever. He was pleased, without any title on our part, to set his affections upon us, poor worms of the earth, and to shew us more mercy than he did to the fallen angels. O ye Heavens, be astonished heret! He humbled himself to exalt us. He *impoverished himself*, says St. Paul, 2 Cor. xviii. to enrich our souls with the treasures of his heavenly graces and blessings. He stooped infinitely beneath the dignity of his supreme majesty, in order to raise us from the profound abyss of misery to the eminent dignity of his adoptive children and heirs of his kingdom.

The bare expectation and foreknowledge of these signal advantages and benefits which were to accrue to mankind from the mystery of his incarnation, filled the holy Patriarchs, Prophets and other Saints of the Old Testament with consolation, and made them ardently and incessantly sigh, weep and pray for the completion of this great mercy. At length the time appointed by Providence for human redemption drawing nigh, God's eternal decrees were brought about and executed. An angelical ambassador was dispatched from Heaven to announce the adorable mystery to the spotless Virgin who was chosen, in preference to all other creatures, to be the mother of the world's Redeemer. The glorious St. John the Baptist was sent as a precursor to prepare the way before him. Accordingly he appeared in the deserts of Judea, like a morning star, to usher in the sun of Divine Justice and the light of the world. The seventy weeks of years, predicted by the prophet Daniel, were nearly expired. The royal sceptre was departed from the house of Juda, according to the renowned prophecy of the patriarch Jacob. The fourth great empire, foretold by Daniel, was exalted to its zenith. The Roman wars were brought to a happy conclusion, and the gates of the temple of Janus, in Rome, were shut according to the usual custom on similar occasions. In short, the world enjoyed the sweets of a general peace, under the fortunate reign of the Emperor Augustus.— This was the very period that the promised Messias, and the desired of all nations, who in the scripture is styled the *Prince of Peace*, chose for visiting the earth, to denote thereby that the end of his coming was to make a general peace between his Heavenly Father and mankind. At this juncture of time an edict was issued by the Emperor, commanding all the subjects of his whole empire, and consequently of Judea and Palestine, then a Roman province, to repair to the respective places of their origin and family, in order to have their names and conditions enrolled there in a public register. This decree was published by the Emperor for political views of state, but the view of the all-ruling providence of God herein was, that by this most authentic act of public registration, it might be manifest to the whole world that our blessed Saviour was de-

scended of the house of David, and the tribe of Juda, and that he was to register the names of his faithful followers and disciples in the book of eternal life. It was in obedience to the aforesaid imperial edict that Mary and Joseph travelled from Nazareth, where they lived, about ninety miles from Jerusalem, to Bethlehem, a small town in the tribe of Juda, called David's-Town, this being the place appointed for those who belonged to his family to be enrolled, and the very place also where the Saviour of the world was to be born. This leads me to the second point; wherein I promised to expatiate on the circumstances of his Nativity.

As our Divine Redeemer was pleased to choose the great city of Jerusalem for the ignominy of his Passion, so he chose the little town of Bethlehem for the glory of his Nativity.—The prophet Micheas, upwards of seven hundred years before, had foretold that Bethlehem, which was about seven miles distant from Jerusalem, should be enobled by the birth of Christ. Hence the Blessed Virgin Mary, by a special direction of Providence, undertook a painful journey of at least four days, through a mountainous country to that place, having no other retinue but her chaste and holy spouse Joseph, who was appointed by Heaven to be her guardian and protector amidst all the hardships she had to encounter. On their arrival in Bethlehem they found all the inns of that town already full; in vain did they seek for a lodging elsewhere, every one despising and rejecting their poverty. In this distress they retired into an open cottage, or a cave on the side of a rock, commonly called a *stable*, as it was only fit to defend beasts from the nipping frosts in winter, and from the scorching heat of the sun in summer. This abject and contemptible hovel, this vile receptacle of beasts, was the palace that the King of Heaven, and the Lord and Master of the universe, was pleased to choose for his Nativity; the throne on which he chose to repose was a manger; a little hay or straw supplied the place of a bed, and the breath of an ox and an ass, which happened to be tied to the manger, served to keep off the cold, and to preserve the Divine Infant from the rigour of the season; for it was in the depth of winter that he was born, to signify that he came from Heaven to kindle the fire of charity on earth, and to warm the frozen hearts of sinners with the flames of divine love. He was born at midnight, to denote that he came to disperse the darkness of infidelity, and to enlighten the world with the light of the Gospel. He chose to be born by miracle, of a most pure and chaste virgin, to shew what a lover he is of the angelical virtue of chastity. He chose to be born in a state of poverty, to set us an example of evangelical poverty, which he preferred to all the grandeur and riches of the world, and to teach us, that they who are really poor in spirit and affection, and submit with patience and resignation to the hardships incident to their state, bid fair for everlasting happiness hereafter, as he afterwards

expressly declared, in his first sermon on the Mount, saying, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* He could have been born in the midst of splendour and opulence, but he would not, because it was not such a Redeemer that the world wanted, or our miseries required, since worldly pomp and grandeur would serve to inflame our passions and nourish our spiritual maladies, rather than cure them. The carnal and sensual Jews, who were strongly attached to earthly goods, and bent upon the gratification of their passions, flattered themselves with the idea that the Messias, whom they expected, would reign here on earth as a most powerful temporal Monarch, and surpass Solomon in riches, and David in military exploits; for they erroneously understood, in a literal sense, whatever the Prophets had said in a figurative sense, of the splendour and glory of the spiritual kingdom of his Church in the new law. They saw clearly, and could not but acknowledge, that the time foretold and appointed for his coming was at length arrived, yet they obstinately refused to believe in him, being offended and scandalized at the abject, poor, and humble condition, in which he made his appearance. This made the Prophet Isaias say, c. i. *The ox shall know his master, and the ass the crib of his lord, but Israel knew me not;* and again, St. John the Evangelist, c. i. v. 10 & 11. *The world knew him not; he came into his own, and his own received him not.*

Alas! my brethren, how widely different are the counsels and views of God, and how far above the counsels and views of men? Our Divine Redeemer was willing to begin, from his very birth in the stable of Bethlehem, to execute the design he had formed to promote the honour and glory of his eternal Father, and to work the salvation of man, by atoning for the offence offered to the Godhead by sin, and repairing by his humility and sufferings, what mankind had forfeited by their pride and sensuality. With this view he made choice of a state of humiliation and poverty from the very beginning of his mortal life. He exposed his tender delicate body to the inclemency of the severest season of the year, to the hard boards of a manger instead of a cradle, and to a privation of the most ordinary conveniencies and necessities of human life. Love for us, and his desire of our salvation, would not suffer him to postpone this great work to the end of his life. He was willing to enter upon the sacred functions of a Redeemer, a Guide and a Teacher, as soon as he came into the world.— He was willing, by embracing such hardships and rigours in his very infancy, to correct the mistaken notions and confound the folly of sinners, who blindly set their hearts and affections on perishable riches, and place all their happiness on earthly enjoyments. He was willing to encourage us, by his own example, to despise the sinful vanities of the world, to renounce the love of sensual pleasures and delights, and to plant the

virtue of humility deeply in our hearts ; for, as all our spiritual disorders spring from three poisonous sources, called by St. John, *concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life*, it was expedient that he who came to be our Saviour, Guide, and Physician, should take the earliest opportunity to prescribe suitable remedies against the inordinate inclinations of our corrupt nature, and inculcate the necessity of counteracting them, by the practice of the opposite virtues.— Whilst he was thus silently teaching and preaching by his example, from the manger of Bethlehem, as from his first pulpit, the air was filled with a charming melody, and began to echo with congratulatory acclamations ; for, as St. Luke informs us, c. ii. the Angels assembled in choir sounded forth the divine praise in the loudest strains, singing, *Gloria, &c. Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will* ; for such were the happy fruits of Christ's nativity, glory to God in the highest Heavens, and peace, that is, reconciliation, grace, and pardon to men on earth. An heavenly messenger was likewise sent to carry the joyful tidings of his nativity, not to any of the proud and haughty grandes of the world, who lived at their ease, wallowing in riches, sensual pleasures and delights, but to a set of humble shepherds, who were keeping the night watches over their flocks. It was to them in particular that the Angel of the Lord appeared, and brought the first news of their Saviour being born. Why so ? To give us to understand that the meek and humble are the favourites of Heaven, and that it is to them the Lord dispenses his gracious favours and blessings in abundance, while he resists the proud and withdraws himself away from them. The humble shepherds were at first struck with panic, and trembled at the splendid and awful appearance of the Angel ; but being animated by him they soon forgot their fears, and hastened with devotion to Bethlehem.— They entered the Stable, and found there the new-born Saviour of the world lying in a manger. Far from being scandalized at the poverty and meanness of his appearance, they were filled with admiration at the infant state to which the Creator of the universe had humbled himself for the love of man. They saw and they believed. They paid him the just tribute of their homage, and returned glorifying and praising the Lord, and speaking with raptures of what they had seen. How many instructive and salutary lessons, my brethren, how many endearing motives of divine love, does this mystery furnish and suggest ?—Does not every circumstance loudly proclaim the power wisdom and mercy of God, and demonstrate the greatness of his goodness, charity and love for man ? Must we not be insensible to the last degree, if our hearts be not penetrated with lively sentiments of gratitude and love for him who has wrought such wonders in our favour ? The more he has humbled himself for our sake, the dearer he should be to us, and the greater ought the fervour of our devotion to be in making him

a tender of our homage, by acts of adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

O let us, therefore, join our hearts and voices, this day with the heavenly choirs of Angels, in glorifying and saluting him with sacred hymns and canticles of spiritual joy; let us, in imitation of the pious shepherds, humbly approach the manger of Bethlehem, and welcome our blessed Saviour into the world. Let us give him the best reception we are able, and embrace him with the most tender affections of our souls. Let us prostrate ourselves in spirit a thousand times at his feet, and entreat him to come and take full possession of our hearts. Let us be careful in removing every obstacle, and in preparing a worthy mansion for him in the temple of our souls, that he may be spiritually born in us by his sanctifying grace, and dwell in us, and we in him, for time and eternity. Let us give ourselves entirely to him, in return for his having given himself entirely to us. His sweet and amiable countenance, which was afterwards beaten, bruised and disfigured for our iniquities; his lovely eyes, which shed so many tears for our sins; his sacred hands and feet, which were nailed to a cross for our sake, and his little delicate veins, already purpled with the precious blood which he poured out so copiously on Mount Calvary for our redemption, they all cry out to us this day with a loud voice, that we ought to engrave the sweet and adorable name of JESUS on our hearts in the deepest characters of love.

O divine Jesus! We adore, praise, thank and glorify thee, for all thou hast done and suffered for our sake. The most acceptable return we are able to make thee is to love thee with our whole heart, and to testify our love and gratitude by the observance of thy commandments and the practice of good works. We offer our hearts, therefore, to thee without reserve; cleanse and purify them, we beseech thee, from all the foul stains of sin, and inflame them with the sacred fire of charity, which thou didst come to kindle on earth. Do not suffer us to frustrate the designs of thy mercy by our perverseness, but give us grace to begin with thee a new life from this happy day of thy Nativity, and to persevere to the end steady and faithful in thy service that after having been replenished with thy graces here, we may be admitted hereafter to partake of thy glory in the sacred mansions of bliss, which is the happiness I wish ye all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

On the Duties of Parents to their Children.

Perfecerunt omnia secundum legem Domini. *S. Luc. c. ii v. 39.*

They performed all things according to the Law of the Lord.

St. Luke, c. ii. v. 39.

THE Gospel informs us that the Blessed Virgin Mary, accompanied with her most chaste spouse St. Joseph, repaired to the city of Jerusalem as soon after the nativity of our Lord as she was allowed by the Mosaic Law to approach the Sanctuary and enter into the Temple of God. She brought with her the Child Jesus, in order to present him there to his eternal Father with the most perfect acts of adoration, praise and thanksgiving. On this occasion a just and religious man in Jerusalem, named Simeon who had received a revelation and promise from the Holy Ghost, that before his death he should see Christ the Saviour of the world, came by divine instinct into the Temple, took the child Jesus out of his mother's hands into his arms, and praised the Lord, in raptures of devotion, for having vouchsafed to grant him the happiness of embracing the object of all his desires, and beholding with his eyes the light of the Gentiles and the glory of the people of Israel, who came for the redemption and salvation of all men, though as Simeon predicted at the same time, on account of the wilful blindness and obstinacy of many unbelievers, who discharged the arrows and darts of their malice against him and his doctrine, he became as it were, a mark of contradiction for their ruin, and for the ruin of others, who like them, refuse to believe in him, and choose to remain in their obstinacy and incredulity. A Prophetess called Anne, venerable for her age, and more so for her piety, was likewise present on the same occasion. The sacred text relates that she was then advanced to the age of four score and four years, and that she constantly attended in the Temple at the times of prayer, *with fastings and prayers, serving God both day and night.* This holy widow was blessed with the sight of the child Jesus in the Temple, and made a public profession of her faith in him. She bore testimony that he was the promised Messiah, and praised and glorified the Lord for having sent him for the consolation and redemption of Israel. In the interim, Mary and Joseph, struck with admiration at all they had seen and heard concerning him, complied with all the ordinances of the Law; and having presented the child Jesus in the Temple, an offering that infinitely surpassed all the offerings that had ever been made there be-

fore, they returned from Jerusalem home to the city of Nazareth, and Jesus, in proportion as he advanced in age, gave every day marks of his divine wisdom, and manifested more and more the heavenly treasures of grace, with which he was replenished from the very first instant of his conception. The care that Mary and Joseph took of him should be the model of all Christian parents, and ought to teach them to present their children to God from their very infancy, and to offer them up to the honour of his Divine Majesty as so many pure holocausts; in short, they should give them an early tincture of piety and religion, instil principles of virtue into their tender minds, and educate them in the fear and love of the Lord, as I purpose with the divine assistance, to shew ye in the following discourse. The importance and necessity of giving children an early virtuous education, shall be the subject of the first point. The manner in which this is to be done, and the particular duties that are comprized under this general head, shall be the subject of the second point, and of your favourable attention. Before we proceed, let us invoke the intercession of the blessed Mother of Jesus, and devoutly recite the angelical salutation. *Ave Maria*, &c.

All civilized nations look upon an early and virtuous education of Children as an object of the first magnitude, and as one of the most effectual means to stop the progress of impiety, to promote the honour and glory of God, to advance the happiness of every country, to preserve peace and order in society, and to prevent the ruin and destruction of numberless souls. It is for this reason that no establishments are deemed more necessary, more useful, or more worthy of encouragement, than such as are wisely instituted and regularly calculated for the laudable purpose of cultivating the tender minds of youth, and sowing the seeds of virtue in the souls of children at an early period of life; for as they come into the world with a deplorable ignorance of the great truths that lead to eternal bliss, and with a strong propensity and violent bent to evil, it is evident that if they be neglected and left to themselves without proper culture, and destitute of the advantages of a virtuous education, they will be apt to rush blindly into all kind of irregularities, and to produce nothing but weeds, tares, and noxious fruits, like unto a piece of ground that is not carefully attended, cultivated and improved. Corrupt nature and bad example will lead them into a long train of sinful disorders, their uncontrolled passions will daily acquire new strength, and bear them down the rapid torrent of iniquity, and as the Scripture expresses it, *their bones shall be filled with the vices of their youth, and they shall sleep with them in the dust.* Job, c. xx. v. 11. The measures which they adopt, and the steps which they take at that critical juncture, usually determine their future conduct ever after, and have a very considerable influence upon their happiness or unhappiness, both in this world and

the next. When they go astray in the beginning of their career, they generally plunge from one error into another, and die as they lived; for as a good beginning makes a good end, so on the contrary, a bad beginning is generally followed by a vicious life, and terminates in an unhappy death. Holy Writ furnishes us with several remarkable instances hereof: amongst the rest, we read that amongst the nineteen Kings of Israel, there was not one that lived or died well, because there was not one of them that began well; and of the twenty Kings of Juda, there were but six who concluded a virtuous life with a happy death, because only six of them had been virtuously educated in their youthful days. Hence the Prophet Jeremy says, *It is good for a man to carry the yoke of the Lord from his youth, because he will not readily depart in his old age from the path into which he enters in his youth*, Prov. xxii. 6. *The first impressions are the most lasting*, says St. Jerome, *and are not to be effaced without much difficulty*. Whilst children are young they are susceptible of every impression, and may be moulded like a piece of soft wax into any form and shape; they may be readily drawn to good or evil, to virtue or to vice, like unto a young tender plant, which is so flexible that it may be easily bent on every side; but as a plant, when it has once sprung up into a tree, is no longer pliable, but will sooner break than bend after some years growth, so in like manner, when the growth of children's passions is not checked and prevented by seasonable remedies; when they are not formed and modelled to virtue in due time; when vice is once suffered to take deep root in their hearts, they generally become inflexible and incorrigible, and continue to advance in their evil ways as they advance in age; or if they ever happen to reform their lives, it is not without great difficulty, and the powerful aid of an extraordinary grace from God, which they have no right to expect after having devoted the first fruits and the bloom of their life to the drudgery of sin and to the service of Satan.

It is, therefore, a matter of the utmost consequence what ideas are first stamped on the ductile minds of children, what sentiments are impressed on their hearts, and to what habits they are formed in their childhood. The happiness of parents themselves, both for time and eternity, no less than that of their children, depends in a great measure hereon. St. Paul tells us, in his first Epistle to Timothy, c. v. v. 8. that parents who do not pay the necessary care and attention to the education of their children betray their trust, act in opposition to their faith, and are worse than infidels. *If any man, says this great Apostle, has not care of his own, and especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*. What judgment then is to be formed of those unhappy parents who are not only careless and deficient in giving their children a Christian education, but contrive so many infernal stratagems to banish and destroy their young infants before they are born

and baptized. Are they not more unnatural than wolves and tigers. Are they not more cruel than Herod himself, who sacrificed so many holy innocents to his pride and ambition? The cruelty of that blood thirsty-tyrant is justly detested by every one who has the least sense of humanity; though as St. Augustine remarks, his malice and hatred to the innocent infants he murdered was of greater service to them than his love could have been, since it was the occasion of their being baptized in their own blood, and receiving a crown of martyrdom in the kingdom of Heaven. He only killed their bodies, which secured the salvation of their souls, whereas antichristian parents, who by the most horrid means prevent the birth of their infants, and murder them by anticipation before they come into the world, destroy both their souls and bodies, and deprive them at once of a temporal and everlasting life. Hear what St. Thomas of Villanova says of such unnatural parents: Now they may seem to escape unpunished, as their crimes are covered with darkness and committed in the greatest secrecy, but the time will come when their impiety shall be manifested in the face of the universe, and when they shall feel the whole weight of God's wrath and indignation. The infants they have destroyed, and the souls they have been the means of sending into the other world without baptism, will demand satisfaction at the bar of divine justice; they will cry out to Heaven for vengeance with as loud a voice as the blood of Abel formerly cried out for vengeance against Cain, the first murderer; nay, with a louder voice, since the spiritual murder and loss of a soul, stamped with the image of God, and ransomed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, is a much more deplorable evil, and one of the most enormous crimes that the malice of Satan can suggest. Remember then, O fathers and mothers, that your care and attention to your infants is, in some respects, to commence even before their birth. If ye wish to be blessed with good children, ye are to supplicate Heaven for them, and in the interim to refrain from drunkenness, from intemperance, and all kind of criminal excesses that might prove any way destructive to their souls or bodies, and tend to invert the laws of nature or frustrate the holy ends of matrimony. After their birth ye are to take all possible care to have them purified without delay from original sin, in the sacred laver of baptism, and like Mary the Mother of Jesus, and Anne the mother of Samuel, to make an offering of them to the Lord with the most lively sentiments of praise and thanksgiving. If ye expect to succeed in their education, ye must begin first with yourselves, reform your own lives and bridle your passions, as children frequently take after their parents, resemble them in their temper, and inherit their humours and dispositions, from, as it were, a kind of secret influence or sympathy that naturally subsists between them. Some of the ancient Pagan Philosophers observing this natural connexion and resemblance, and

not being able to account properly for it, were so weak as to give into the erroneous doctrine of the transmigration of souls, or to teach, as St. Augustine relates, that one part of the father and mother's soul was transmitted into the bodies of their children ; which ridiculous opinion is justly exploded and condemned by the Church of God, as being opposite to sound reason and divine revelation.

Now, as to the particular obligations which parents contract with regard to the education of their children, they consist chiefly in love, instruction, correction, good example and prayer. Their first duty is to love their children. Christ our Lord, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, shews parents what ought to be their love for their children. Nature itself dictates this obligation. The serpents, lions, and wolves, as St. Augustine observes, *Serm. 185*, love their young ones by an impulse of nature, and feed and rear them until they are in a condition to provide for themselves ; the wild bird suffers itself to be made captive rather than desert its callow offspring, and the timid hen fights and perishes by the hawk rather than surrender her little brood ; and shall any Christians be so unnatural, and so inferior to the very brute creation in this respect, as to abandon their little infants in streets and entries, never more to behold them ? Shall they be so unmerciful as to expose them to the mercy of the public, without caring what will afterwards become of their souls, or whether they are likely to be brought up in the fear and love of God, and in the principles of the Christian religion ? Shall they be so heard-hearted, so unjust, so inhuman, as to leave them famishing with hunger at home, or to encumber strangers with the expense of their maintenance, whilst they themselves are squandering the earnings of a whole week in drinking and gambling abroad ? Alas ! this is but too often the case, though it is the indispensable duty of parents to love their children, and of course not only to provide necessary food and raiment for the support of their bodies, but also to provide for the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of their immortal souls, as God himself, the common Father of mankind, provides for our natural subsistence in this life, and for our spiritual and eternal happiness in the next.— He has given parents a property in their children, which no one has a right to rob them of. They are given to the poor as a valuable treasure, in the place of the perishable wealth of the world ; whilst they have them, they console their afflictions, they lighten the load of worldly distress, they cheer them with future hopes, and by their presence convey such transports of joy to their hearts, that none but unfeeling and unnatural parents can endure their little ones to be wrested and torn from their arms for ever. In consequence of the love that is due to them, mothers, regularly speaking, should suckle their own infants themselves, and preserve them from all dangerous accidents, such as are often occasioned by fire and water, and by

being overlaid at night and smothered in their sleep, a remarkable instance of which the sacred Scripture relates to have happened in the days of King Solomon. Nature teaches even the wild beasts the necessity of suckling their young ones, and the example of Sara the mother of Isaac, of Anne the mother of Samuel, and of Mary the mother of Jesus, should induce Christian mothers to fulfil this office themselves, unless a real necessity, or some weighty reason may exempt them from it ; and in this case they should be particularly nice in the choice of proper persons to be substituted in their own place, especially as children are so apt to take after their nurses, and to imbibe with their milk their corporal infirmities and natural dispositions. Hence it is that spiritual writers, as well as moral philosophers, condemn those mothers who, without any just cause, turn their little innocent infants out of doors in a few days after they are born, and abandon part of their own bowels to the care of strange nurses, as if they were divested of the common feelings of nature. But if such parents be reprehensible, how much more so are those who in a manner idolize their children, and suffer themselves to be overruled by a passionate fondness and blind inordinate affection for them ? They should remember that the love required of them should not be a mere natural love, but a discreet Christian love, tempered with reason and religion, and like unto the love of Abraham for his son Isaac, always kept in due subordination to the love which they owe to the Lord their God above all things ; it should not be partial, or confined only to one of their children, but should extend itself to them all in general without exception ; for, as St. Ambrose says, nature dictates that as they all have an equal share of their parents' blood, they should share equally in their love without any remarkable difference, especially since a blind predilection of one child above the rest is apt to sow the seeds of discord in families, and to draw the envy, jealousy and hatred of the other children on him who is visibly cherished, indulged and preferred to them, as happened to Joseph, the favourite child of the Patriarch Jacob.

The second duty of parents is to instruct their children, according to these words of the Holy Scripture : *If you have children, instruct them, and bend them to virtue from their childhood*, Eccles. ix. Even before they have arrived at the perfect use of reason, their mouths, hearts and memories are to be filled with pious and heavenly things, and not, as frequently happens, with idle or immodest songs, nonsense and fooleries, which serve only to poison their minds and corrupt their hearts. They should be carefully instructed in the rudiments of religion, and the primary articles of faith concerning the mysteries of the Unity of God, the Trinity of the Divine Persons, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Fall and Redemption of Mankind, &c. They are to be informed of the end of their creation, and of the indispensable obligation to serve and

worship God by faith, hope, charity and good works. Their parents should look upon themselves as guardians appointed by Almighty God, to preserve them in the happy state of their baptismal sanctity, free from the corruption of the world, and out of the reach of its dangerous snares, pomps and vanities, which they solemnly announced when they were enrolled amongst the adopted children of Christ; and therefore, far from instilling the spirit of pride, the love of fine dress, or sentiments of resentment and revenge into their tender minds, they should inspire them with a love of virtue and a hatred of sin, by laying before them the beauty and loveliness of the one, and the baseness and dreadful consequences of the other. They should make them sensible, that without religion they cannot be truly happy even in this life, nor even become useful members and ornaments of society. These great truths are to be frequently inculcated, that they may sink deep into their minds, and be their safeguard and protection against every danger and temptation which they may have afterwards to encounter. Thus it was that the pious mother of St. Lewis, King of France, took care to instruct him in his childhood, and had the comfort to see her instructions crowned with wonderful success. The history of her life informs us, that she was accustomed to preach the following lesson to him every day: My dear child, though you are the object of my most tender affections, yet I would rather see you stripped of your right to the royal crown and extensive dominions of your illustrious ancestors, and lying dead before my eyes, than see you stripped of the white robe of your baptismal innocence, and defiled with one single mortal sin. In like manner St. Monica, the devout mother of the great Augustine, made it her constant study and practice to preach the love of God and the duties of religion to him, when yet a child; and her daily instructions made so deep and so lasting an impression on his mind, that they often recurred afterwards when he had the misfortune to deviate from the paths of virtue, and made him so many tacit reproaches, that at length they became one of the happy means that God in his great mercy employed for the conversion of his soul. He tells us in the book of his confessions, that he had sucked in the sweet name of Jesus along with his mother's milk, and became so enamoured of it in the very midst of his errors, that he could find no taste or relish in the most florid pieces of Cicero's oratory and eloquence, because he did not meet this holy and adorable name mentioned therein. Such are the salutary effects and blessed fruits of early religious instructions, given by parents to their children. If, therefore, O Christian parents, ye have your own and your children's salvation at heart, ye will instruct them betimes in the love and fear of the Lord; they are sacred pledges and precious deposits which he has entrusted to your care, and for which ye must be accountable if they happen to be lost through your

fault, or to perish eternally through your neglect. Be not deceived then, cries out St. John Chrysostom; it is your duty to instruct your children, and to kindle the fire of divine love in their hearts; your mouths and your lips are their books; ye are their teachers and preachers, their masters and apostles; ye are to conduct yourselves in your respective families like bishops in their dioceses, for ye are, like them, charged with the care and tuition of every soul under your jurisdiction. St. Augustine coincides with the aforesaid holy Doctor, and says, it is incumbent on ye, O fathers and mothers, to act the part of doctors and preachers in your own houses; for as it is our duty to announce the word of God to ye in the church, so, in like manner, it is your duty to announce it at home to your children and domestics.

The third duty of a parent is to correct and chastise his children when they offend God, as God, on his part, denounces a just punishment against them when they offend and dishonour their parents. *He that spares the rod hates his son*, as the Scripture says, Prov. xiii. and again Eccles. xxx. *Whoever loves his child will chastise him, that he may rejoice in the end.* It is also said in the same chapter, *Bend the neck of thy son in his youth, chastise him while he is young, that he may not become headstrong and stiff-necked when he is grown up, and make thy heart ache by his stubbornness.* Here is a lesson and warning to those parents who are blind to their children's faults, or who have not resolution enough to give them proper correction when they deserve it. By a just judgment of God, and in punishment of their criminal indulgence, it often happens that those very children whose faults they overlook, and whom they indulge the most, fly afterwards in their face, become their heaviest crosses and greatest scourges, make them feel the smart and pain of their disorderly behaviour, and shorten their days by grief and vexation, scandal, shame and confusion; for which reason the Scripture says, *A child who is suffered to follow his own will covers his mother with scandal*, Prov. xxix. The sad effects of the neglect of due correction, and of that excessive fondness which is so natural to many parents, that it causes them to connive at the faults and misdemeanors of their children, appeared visibly in Heli, an High Priest in the old law; he had not courage enough to chastise his two wicked sons, Ophni and Phinees, and thereby he drew the vengeance of Heaven upon himself and upon his posterity. He gave them indeed a gentle rebuke, but he did not make use of the authority which he had in quality of their father, and as High Priest, to correct them and put a stop to their impiety; wherefore the Lord sent a Prophet to him to denounce the most severe punishments against him, all which were soon literally accomplished, as we read 1 Kings, c. ii. and iii.

Correction, to be useful and profitable, must be seasonable, suitable, and proportioned to the fault; it must be given with

great prudence and discretion, with a composed and settled mind, with charity and with a paternal heart, not to gratify a vindictive spirit or the anger of a parent, but to amend and reform his child. *Fathers*, says St. Paul, *bring up your children in discipline and correction of the Lord*, Ephes. c. vi. v. 4.—And again, Coloss. iii. 21, *Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged*. All extremes should be avoided; for as too much indulgence and lenity are highly pernicious, so too much asperity and harshness are often productive of fatal consequences. To keep children always in terror, to treat them with severity on all occasions, to beat them without mercy and without reason, has more the appearance of hatred than of love, and instead of being serviceable or producing any good effect, will rather prove detrimental, as it will naturally sour the temper of children, increase their obstinacy, and lessen their esteem and affection for their parents. Passionate correction, that is given in the midst of horrid oaths and imprecations, as often happens, may be compared to a violent storm accompanied with flashes of lightning, claps of thunder and heavy showers of rain, which only serve to annoy the fruits of the earth; but as a seasonable and gentle shower is productive of much good, so a moderate correction cannot fail to produce the most salutary effects, when it is given in a Christian manner, with a proper intention, and upon a just and necessary occasion.

Correction is never more necessary than when children approach the years of maturity; for as their passions grow stronger and increase with their age, and as a thousand temptations and dangerous occasions of seduction present themselves on every side, they never stand more in need of being kept under regular subjection, and of being gradually inured to the practice of self-denial and mortification, both in their will and senses. A zealous parent should therefore endeavour to convince them, that pleasures which gratify the senses are to be guarded against, and to be used with great fear and moderation. He should be particularly careful to support his own authority, and enforce due obedience to his orders; he should redouble his vigilance, and observe every vicious turn that they may take, in order to root out the growing evil in time, and curb their youthful passions as soon as they first begin to make their appearance. In short, he should remove from them, if possible, whatever may contribute to feed the inclinations of corrupt nature, such as vicious companions, dangerous diversions, amorous novels, and all other bad books, which sully the imaginations and poison the idea of children, and may be justly looked upon as the bane of virtue and the pest of youth. It is to the neglect of such precautions, and to the criminal connivance of an indulgent and careless father, that St. Augustine attributes a great part of the disorders of his youthful days. The briars and thorns of sinful desires, says he, sprung out of the

fertile soil of my corrupt nature, and grew higher than my head, and there was no hand to weed them out by due correction. His pious mother, indeed, left nothing undone on her part; but for want of the father's concurrence her endeavours proved ineffectual for a long time. His father winked at his immoralities, laughed at his loose expressions, and passed them by with impunity, as the sallies of a sprightly genius.—He did not mind whether his son was chaste or lascivious, so that he was but witty and eloquent. Herein he resembled many unhappy parents of our days, who in open violation of their duty, and to the great prejudice and scandal of their children, overlook their impieties, and laugh at their wanton words, jests and actions. *Laugh not at thy son*, says the Holy Ghost, Eccles. xxx. 9, *lest thou have sorrow, and at last thy teeth be set on an edge.*

There is still another duty that must crown a parent's care, and bring to perfection the good fruits of a Christian education; that is, *to give good example to their children*, and to offer up their fervent prayers daily to God, that he may vouchsafe to preserve them by his divine grace from all sin and danger, and give them his blessing. Without the blessing of God all other means will prove ineffectual and unsuccessful. *Unless He builds the house, in vain do they labour that build it*, says the Royal Prophet, Ps. cxxvi. Let a gardener be ever so assiduous in cultivating and weeding his garden, and in sowing good seed in it, all he does will avail nothing unless it be watered with the dew of Heaven; Paul may plant, and Apollo may water, but *it is God that gives the increase*, as the Apostle speaks, 1 Cor. iii. Parents, therefore, instead of cursing and damning their children, as several frequently do upon the least provocation, and even without any real offence, ought both in their morning and evening prayers to beseech the Giver of all good gifts to bless and preserve them, in imitation of holy Job, who, as the Scripture relates, rising up early, offered sacrifices and holocausts to God for every one of his children, lest they should have offended God by sin, Job c. i. v. 5. To give good example to children, by leading virtuous and edifying lives, is the lesson of lessons. This was the important advice that St. Jerome wrote to a Roman Lady, who had consulted him upon the education of her daughter:—Be careful, said he, to give her no other example but what she may safely follow without offending the Lord her God; let her be witness to nothing but what may contribute to inspire her with an aversion to sin and a love of virtue; for to advise a child to one thing, and practise the contrary, is to destroy with one hand what the other hand has taken pains to erect. Hence St. Chrysostom says, in his exposition of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, Pious parents, who shew their children good example at home, are of more service to them and to their other domestics, than I by all my preaching in the church, because my sermons are

either seldom heard or easily forgotten by them ; but the good example of a parent is always before the children's eyes, and cannot but have the greatest influence imaginable upon them. This should make all parents cautious, even to a nicety, what they either say or do in the presence of their children, since it carries so much weight with it.

Thrice happy are the parents who edify and educate their children after this manner ; they shall receive a triple crown for their reward : First, a crown of honour in this life, for a virtuous child, is the consolation joy, satisfaction, and crown of his father, as the Scripture says, Prov. xvii. 6. Secondly, they shall receive a crown of grace, for a virtuous education of children is the cause of their parents' salvation, as St. Paul teaches, 1 Tim. ii. Thirdly, they shall receive a crown of glory in Heaven, for as the Prophet Daniel assures us, c. xii. v. 3. Those who instil virtue in many, and instruct them in the science of salvation, shall shine like stars before the throne of God for perpetual eternities. Which is the happiness I wish ye all, in the name of the Father, &c. Amen.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

On the transcendent Sanctity of the name of Jesus, and the high respect that is due to it.

Postquam consummati sunt dies octo, ut circumcideretur Puer, vocatum est Nomen ejus Jesus.—*Luc. c. ii. v. 21.*

When eight days were accomplished, that the Child was to be circumcised, his Name was called Jesus.—St. Luke, c. ii. v. 21.

IN the mystery of this day we behold the Son of God, with the most amazing condescension and profound humility, submitting himself to the rigorous ceremony of circumcision, and purchasing a right to the venerable name of Jesus by the effusion of his sacred blood. Circumcision was a seal or sign of the covenant made between God and Abraham in the old law. It was first observed by Abraham, and as St. Augustine says, was regarded as an outward profession of faith, and a remedy for cancelling original sin in the male descendants of Abraham and his posterity, who were thereby distinguished from all other nations, as in the new law Christians are distinguished from all other people by the sacrament of baptism. Christ our Lord, as the Apostle speaks, being separated from sinners by his innate sanctity and spotless innocence, stood in no need of receiving this mark and character, or of submitting to the severity of a law that was made for sinners ; however, as he

came not to violate but to fulfil the law, and as Heaven and earth were to be reconciled by his sufferings, and the pride and disobedience of our first parents to be expiated by his humiliations and obedience, he vouchsafed to undergo the humiliating and painful operation of the knife of circumcision on the eighth day after he was born. The same boundless and inestimable charity which had induced him to clothe himself with the nature of man, and to appear on the day of his nativity in the stable of Bethlehem, under the figure of a poor, forlorn infant, induced him likewise to put on the livery and appearance of a sinner, and to charge himself with our guilt as soon as he came into the world. He would not wait until the time of his passion and death on Mount Calvary, where he was to shed his sacred blood more copiously for our sake, even to the very last drop, but he was willing to commence the great work of our redemption at the very beginning of his mortal life, almost as soon as he came into the world, to shew that he was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, and to satisfy the justice of the offended Deity, by substituting himself a victim of infinite value and dignity in the place of fallen man. No less a price was required for man's redemption, and for cancelling the sins of the world, than his precious blood, and this price he designed to pay in full on the altar of the cross; but he was pleased to advance an earnest on part of this great ransom at an earlier period, by presenting the first fruits and drops of his blood to his eternal Father in the mystery of this day. Thus he sanctified the first day of the new year, giving us at the same time a pledge of his love; and publicly professing himself to be the Saviour of mankind; for it was upon this occasion that he took the august name of Jesus, which signifies *a Saviour*, as is evident from the orders which the Angel of the Lord, sent down from Heaven communicated to St. Joseph: *Joseph, Son of David, said he, fear not to take Mary thy spouse, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Such an overflowing and wonderful excess of his infinite mercy, calls upon us this day for the most grateful acknowledgment, and should engage us to engrave on our hearts the sweet name of *Jesus* in the deepest characters of love; it should animate us at the beginning of this new year to imitate his corporal circumcision, by a spiritual circumcision of our hearts, whereof the legal circumcision was but a type and figure, according to the Apostle, Rom. ii. 28. In short, whenever we hear the sacred name of *Jesus* pronounced, the very sound of it should inspire us with respect, love and gratitude, as it calls to our remembrance all the benefits he has conferred upon us, and expresses the whole work of our redemption in two syllables. To excite ye, therefore, to the like tender feelings and pious sentiments, and to impress your minds with a salutary

abhorrence and aversion to the impious practice of profaning and abusing this blessed name by the most dreadful oaths, imprecations and blasphemies, is the design of the following discourse. The transcendent sanctity, virtue and excellence of the name of Jesus, shall be the subject of the first point ; the high respect and veneration that is due to the name of Jesus, shall be the subject of the second point. Let us, as usual, invoke the intercession of the blessed mother of Jesus, greeting her with the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The holy Scripture relating to the noble exploits of the valiant Eleazer, in the sixth chapter of the first book of Machabees, says, that he delivered himself up as a victim in order to raise his people, and acquire an immortal name. These words are ascribed to our Saviour by the Church in her Divine Office, and justly, for, as St Paul speaks in his epistle to the Philippians, c. ii. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death ; for which reason God has exalted him, and given him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those who are in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth.* It was in recompence of his profound humiliations that the eternal Father, who alone knew what title was the most suitable to the sacred character and dignity of his beloved Son, gave him the excellent name of *Jesus*, a name of majesty, triumph and glory ; a name of sanctity and salvation ; a name of mercy and love ; a name of sweetness and heavenly comfort ; a name of power and strength ; a name that the Angels in Heaven incessantly praise and glorify ; a name that the Church here on earth holds in the highest esteem and veneration ; a name that strikes fear and terror into the infernal spirits, who reside in the very lowest regions of hell. It is no wonder, then, that the spouse in the Canticles compares the name of her beloved to oil, because, as oil swims above all other liquids, so the name of *Jesus*, the beloved bridegroom of our souls, is above all other names. It is also the property of oil to heal, to nourish, and to give light. It serves for a medicine, for food, and for light, says St. Bernard. In like manner, the name of *Jesus* is a medicine that heals the wound of the soul. It is a food that nourishes pious and chaste affections in the heart. It is a light that illumines the understanding, and inflames the will. At the light of this name, all clouds are scattered, gloomy thoughts vanish away, peace and joy appear, and serenity is restored to the mind. By this food our weakness is strengthened, and our wearied spirits are recruited.—All food of the soul seems insipid unless it be seasoned with this salt. It is dry, says St. Bernard, unless this oil be poured on it. The holy martyrs and champions of religion were anointed with this oil, says St. Ambrose, and were thereby rendered invincible and victorious in spite of all the attempts of cruelty and malice.

It was by the virtue of the holy name of Jesus that the Apostles overthrew the Empire of Satan, destroyed paganism, abolished superstition, converted nations, and established christianity upon the ruins of the Jewish synagogue. It was in this name that they defeated the princes of darkness, cast out devils and wrought numberless prodigies. It was in this name, as Christ foretold them, that they healed the sick, cured the dumb, the deaf and the blind, and raised the dead to life. Not to produce a great variety of instances of this truth recorded in holy writ, the third chapter of the acts of the Apostles furnish us with a very illustrious example, for we read there that as St. Peter and St. John were going upon a certain day to the temple of Jerusalem to prayers, a poor cripple, who had been lame from his mother's womb, being carried to the gate of the temple according to his usual custom, in order to beg the charitable assistance of those who came to offer up their prayers and sacrifices there to the Lord, and seeing the two Apostles passing by, he humbly craved an alms from them; whereupon St. Peter, fixing his eyes on him, immediately replied, Silver and gold I have none, but what I have this I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And accordingly St. Peter had no sooner expressed these words but the poor cripple stood up in an instant, and followed him into the temple leaping with joy, and praising God in the presence of a multitude of people, who were amazed to see so conspicuous a miracle wrought before their eyes, by virtue of the name of *Jesus*. The stiff-necked Jews indeed were confounded hereat, and threatened the Apostles severely, charging them most strictly not to preach or teach any more in that name. But this only served to fire their zeal, and animate them to preach with greater confidence. Nay, the very name of *Jesus* inspired them with such courage and intrepidity that, as the scripture informs us, after they had been publicly scourged by order of the Jewish Council, they departed rejoicing to find that they were thought worthy to suffer contumely for the name of *Jesus*.

This is the name that prostrated Saul on the road of Damascus, and changed him from a Jew into a Christian, from a persecutor into a preacher, from a sinner into a saint, from an enemy of the cross into a zealous disciple, and an indefatigable apostle. This is the name that he was ordered to carry before the Gentiles, the kings of the earth, and the children of Israel. This is the name wherein he gloried so much, and which he seems to have taken a particular pleasure and delight in repeating frequently in his Epistles, even where it might appear to be superfluous. It was the wonderful virtue of this name that sweetened all his sufferings and apostolic labours and inspired him with undaunted courage, when he appeared before the tribunals of the most barbarous tyrants. It was it also that rendered the stones so welcome to St. Stephen,

the cross so precious to St. Andrew, the gridiron so pleasant to St. Laurence, and the wheel so acceptable to St. Catherine. It is related in the lives of several other saints, that the very sound of the holy name of *Jesus* replenished their hearts with divine love, spiritual joy and consolation; which made St. Bernard say that *Jesus* is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, and jubilation in the heart of a pious christian. We read of St. Francis of Assise, that his heart was filled with an inexpressible sweetness whenever he invoked it, or heard it pronounced with due respect; and St. Augustine tells us in his confessions, that the florid eloquence of Tully, with which he had been much delighted before his conversion, began immediately after to appear dry and insipid to him, because he did not meet with the sweet name of *Jesus* in his writings. St. Francis of Sales says, in a letter which he wrote to a devout person, "I have not time to write any thing but the great name of salvation, *Jesus*. O what sweetness would this name diffuse in our souls, did we but pronounce it devoutly from our hearts. But I cannot express what I mean by pronouncing this holy name. To speak of it, or to express it worthily, a person should have a tongue of fire." Another great servant of God cries out with extacy, "O Divine *Jesus*, on thee depends my happiness, my life and my death. Whatever I do shall be done in thy name. If I watch, *Jesus* shall be before my eyes. If I sleep, I will close my eyes, breathing the pure love of *Jesus*. If I walk it shall be in the sweet company of *Jesus*. If I pray, *Jesus* shall animate my prayers. If I am sick, *Jesus* shall be my physician, and my comforter. If I die, it is in the bosom of *Jesus*, who is my life, that I hope to die. *Jesus* shall be my tomb, and his name and cross shall be my epitaph." As for the devout St. Bernard, he seems to be always in raptures when he speaks of the sacred name of *Jesus*. If any one be overwhelmed with sadness, says this holy Doctor, if he be oppressed with the heavy load of sin, or finds himself on the brink of perdition, and in danger of being dashed against the rock of despair, let him call *Jesus* to his mind, and he shall be relieved and fortified. Let *Jesus* not depart from his mouth; let *Jesus* not depart from his heart; let him raise up his eyes to Heaven with confidence, and devoutly cry out to *Jesus* to save him, as Peter did when he was sinking under the waves of the sea, and he shall be saved, according to these words of the scripture, *Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* Rom. x. 13. St. Peter assures us, in c. iv. of the Acts of the Apostles, v. 12. that *there is no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved*, but the name of *Jesus*. It is for this reason that it is so frequently invoked in the administration of the holy sacraments, and in the exorcisms and divine office of the Church. Our prayers and supplications to Heaven are also generally concluded with this sacred name, in hopes that

they will become the more acceptable and the more efficacious, according to the promise of Christ himself, in c. xiv. v. 13. of St. John, where he says, *Whatsoever you will ask the Father in my name, he will grant it to you.* His blessed name is the weapon with which the Church arms her children in the article of death, that they may come off victorious in the day of battle, and be able to bid defiance to Satan, as David formerly did to Goliath, saying, You come armed with a sword, a spear, and a shield to encounter me, but I come to you in the name of the Lord. The name of *Jesus* is frequently sounded in their ears on their death bed, and their departing souls are sent forth out of this world in his name, in order to strengthen their faith, animate their hope and inflame their charity, at that awful moment when they are to be presented before the Divine tribunal.

Must we not then, my brethren, be void of all piety and religion if we do not pay due respect to this most holy name, which we can never sufficiently honour? With what confidence shall those sinners invoke it at their dying hour, who during the course of their life make it their daily practice to dishonour and abuse it by the most scandalous oaths and blasphemies? Have they not reason to apprehend that, instead of feeling any comfort, or reaping any benefit in this last agony by crying out *Lord, Lord!* and invoking that blessed name, which they now most impiously profane, they will perhaps be suffered to expire with some customary oath or blasphemy in their mouths, like unto the blaspheming thief on Mount Calvary, who by a just judgment of God, was permitted to die in his sins, and descend from the temporal punishment of the cross into the eternal flames of hell? For can any thing be more insolent, more audacious, or more provoking to the supreme Majesty of God than to be thus insulted and abused by the sacrilegious tongues of his own creatures, for whom he has nothing hut sentiments of love and tenderness? Can any thing be more ungrateful than to fly thus in the face of their most bountiful benefactor at the very time that he is showering down his favours and blessings on them? Do they not justly deserve to be abandoned by him at the hour of death who abandon him in their life time, and to be then refused that mercy which they now abuse as an encouragement to sin? Though our hearts were supposed to be constantly employed in loving our Lord *Jesus Christ*, and our tongues incessantly occupied in praising and glorifying his name, yet we would still fall infinitely short of the love respect and veneration we owe him. The scripture teaches us, that in his name every knee should bend, and every tongue should proclaim his glory. At the sound of it the Angels adore, and the very devils themselves tremble; and shall the most noble part of the creation on earth be so perverse as to treat it with irreverence and contempt? Alas! this is so often the case, that the Lord

himself complains hereof, through the mouth of the Prophet Isaías, c. lii. v. 5. where he says, My name is continually blasphemed from morning till night, from the rising to the setting of the sun. The contagion has at length become so general, that the very public streets frequently resound with the loud thunder of the most tremendous oaths and blasphemies, proceeding from the mouths not only of professed libertines, but also of the people of fashion, of the heads of families, and even the very sex which modesty should characterize. They are neither afraid nor ashamed to bring down the sacred name of Jesus upon every frivolous occasion, and to make it the subject of every senseless exclamation, so that if he was formerly scourged with the rods of the Jews, he is now a-days, according to the remark of St. Augustine, daily and hourly scourged with the blaspheming tongues of many, who undeservedly bear the name and character of Christians. But unless they avert the wrath of Heaven by a timely and sincere conversion, the day will come when they shall wish they had been born dumb, and that their lips had been closed for ever rather than to have opened them to their eternal perdition, like unto the beast mentioned in c. xiii. of the Apocalypse, which was cast into a pool of fire and sulphur because it had opened its mouth in blasphemies against God and his saints.

It is the duty of every Christian, who has any regard for the honour and glory of God, to discountenance this odious vice as far as lies in his power, and to pay a religious respect and veneration to the holy name of *Jesus* as often as he hears it profaned. It is to inculcate this duty, to kindle the devotion of the faithful to this name, and to eliminate the wicked practice of swearing and blaspheming from all Christian families, that the church celebrates a particular festival and office every year in honour of the venerable name of *Jesus*, and grants so many indulgences to those who bow their head respectfully on hearing it pronounced, or who recite with devotion the Litany of that sacred name, or who repeat the words, *Praised be Jesus Christ for evermore. Amen.* The Church, in fine, zealously exhorts all her children, at this time, in the words of St. Paul, saying, Coloss. c. iii. v. 17. *Whatever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* In displaying the mystery of this day, she calls upon them to renounce all impiety and worldly desires; to cast off the works of darkness, and to live soberly, justly and piously; to mortify their unruly passions, and to circumsise the inordinate desires and affections of their hearts. Without this inward circumcision, and spiritual mortification of the heart and the passions, the external circumcision, or mortification of the body, will avail but little. Before all things God is to be adored in spirit and truth. Our interior must be reformed, and our inordinate affections must be retrenched and cut off by self-denial. This is the distinguishing

character of the disciples of Christ in the new law, as the legal circumcision was a distinctive mark in the old law of the true Israelites and children of Abraham, which made St. Paul say, Galat. c. v. v. 24. that *they who belong to Christ crucify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences*. We cannot, therefore, my brethren, begin the new year better than by joining the internal worship and homage of our hearts with the external worship, and divesting ourselves of the old man, with all his deeds, in order to put on Jesus Christ, and begin the year in his name, referring all that we do in the course of it to God's honour and glory. The old year is now expired, and we are entering into a new one. Thus it is that our years pass over without interruption, and the fleeting moments continually fly from us never more to return. Each instant we approach our last end. Every step we take brings us nearer to the grave, and we are hastening as fast as the wings of time can carry us towards the immense gulph of eternity. This present year will be perhaps the last year of our life, and I sincerely wish it may prove a happy year to ye all, in the most christian sense of the word; but to render it such as I wish it, depends on yourselves, and on the measures which ye now take to redeem the past time that ye have mispent, and to expiate the sins that ye have heretofore committed. The foregoing year has put a period to the lives of thousands, who are now lying in their graves, though at the commencement of it they were as likely to live as those they have left behind them, and as the very youngest and most healthful person in this congregation.—What has happened them may happen us, since there is no fence or security against death. Many of them might be now happy souls in Heaven had they but reformed their lives, and began to pursue a Christian line of conduct a year ago. They were exhorted to it, as I now exhort you. They were forewarned of the danger of putting off their conversion, as I now forewarn you; but presuming that they had the prospect of many happy years before them, they neglected the means of salvation, and continued in their sinful disorders until they were suddenly cut off the face of the earth, and hurried in a state of impenitence to the awful tribunal of Divine Justice.—Their misfortune should be a warning to us all to begin this year well, and to make good use of our time before the night of death overtakes us. In imitation of the Royal Prophet, Ps. lxxvi. v. 5, we should *never lose sight of the years of eternity*, but begin in time to store up a provision of good works against the last and tremendous hour, which is to decide whether we are to be happy or unhappy for ever and ever.

O Father of mercies and God of all consolation, we return thee thanks for all thy favours and blessings which thou hast conferred on us, and particularly for having hitherto spared us and brought us safe to the beginning of this new year.—May thy holy name be blessed and praised for ever. We re-

solve with thy assistance, to begin from this hour to love and serve thee with new fervour and zeal, and to endeavour to satisfy thee for the long arrears of love and service which we owe thy infinite goodness. Hear not, we beseech thee, the voice of our past iniquities, which cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance; but hear the voice of thy beloved Son's blood, which cries still louder to Heaven for mercy, and demands forgiveness for all repenting sinners. O may the tears which trickle down from his sacred eyes plead our pardon and efface our sins. May his infinite merits sanctify all our undertakings the ensuing year, and render them acceptable in thy sight.— And thou, O Divine *Jesus*, be unto us a *Jesus*. Put thy name as a signet upon our hearts, and fill us with that reverential awe, respect and love, which are due to thy sovereign majesty, that after honouring and serving thee faithfully here on earth, and following thee as our model and our guide, we may enjoy thee hereafter as the author, the source, and the object of our everlasting happiness. *Amen.*

ON THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Vidimus Stellam ejus in Oriente, et venimus adorare eum.—St. Mat. c. ii. v. 2.

We have seen his Star in the East, and are come to adore him.—St. Mat. c. ii. v. 2.

IN the mystery of this day, which is called the *Epiphany*, or Manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we behold two of the principal attributes of God clearly displayed; I mean his boundless mercy and his strict justice; his mercy in regard of the Gentiles, whom he was graciously pleased to call to the light of faith in the person of the three *Magi*, or wise men of the East; and his justice with regard to the Jews, whom he rejected in the person of Herod and the rulers of that incredulous nation. The Messiah, the hope and expectation of Israel, came at length at the time, and in the place foretold by the Prophets, and behold three sages or wise men, commonly stiled Kings, conducted by a new and miraculous star, seek him, find him, recognize him, prostrate themselves before him, adore him, and having opened their treasures, offer him presents of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, whilst the King and people of the Holy city of Jerusalem were disturbed at the news of his birth, and stood astonished and confounded.—Such is the grand and profound secret of divine mercy and

justice, hidden from all eternity in the bosom of God, and manifested on this occasion in the vocation of the Gentiles, and in the reprobation of the Jews. But what instruction shall we draw from a truth so consoling on the one hand, and terrifying on the other? The same that St. Paul does, when, after treating divinely of this important subject in his Epistle to the Romans, he concludes with these memorable words, *See therefore the goodness and severity of God*; his goodness towards the Gentiles, which he has extended to us, who are their descendants and successors, and his severity towards the Jews, which he will extend also to us if we imitate them; we should, therefore, gratefully acknowledge the goodness of God, and awfully dread his severity. His mercy which shines so bright in the mystery of this day in favour of the Gentiles, who were graciously called after having been abandoned so long, should penetrate us with the deepest sense of gratitude; and his justice, which exerts itself with such rigour against the Jews, who were abandoned after having been sought and cherished so long, should inspire us with a salutary fear. Behold, my dear brethren, two reflections, that form the division of the following discourse, and appear most suitable to the great mystery that the Gospel of this day relates. Let us, before we proceed to develop it, prostrate ourselves, like the wise men of the East, before our new-born Redeemer, and devoutly implore the divine aid, through the intercession of the ever-blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The Gospel informs us, that Jesus being born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of King Herod, certain sages or wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, inquiring where the King of the Jews was born. They are generally understood to have been men in high dignity, nurtured in idolatry, and confirmed in superstition by instruction, by example, and by habit. The first effect of God's mercy to them was, the apparition of an extraordinary constellation, which illuminated their hemisphere, and served them for a guide, as the luminous cloud had served the children of Israel for a guide in the desert. The second favour conferred on them was at Jerusalem, where they learned the sense of the sacred Scripture by the ministry of the lawful doctors of the Jewish synagogue, and were informed by them of the particular place where the promised Messiah was to be born; and the third grace they were favoured with was at Bethlehem, where the Saviour of the world, whom they came to adore in his infancy, revealed himself to them as a light destined to enlighten the Gentiles, of whom they were the first fruits, and as I may say, the progenitors of Christianity, since it was by them, and in them, that our vocation and salvation began, as we were called, through them, to the light of the Gospel and of the true saving faith. The star of Jacob, the sign of the promised Messiah, appeared to them, and they

obeyed its dictates without demur, and set out in search of him, though separated by an immense tract of country. *We have seen his star in the East*, said they, *and we are come to adore him.* Persuaded by the inward light of faith, which began then by its rays to illumine the eyes of their souls, and to disperse the darkness of infidelity wherein they had been immersed, that the star which appeared over their heads, and directed its course towards Judea, was something supernatural and divine, sent from above to instruct them where they should seek the King of the Jews, who was already the object of their most ardent desires, and who was shortly to become the object of their most profound adorations, they bid defiance to every obstacle, and answered the call of Heaven in spite of every opposition. Their faith was so heroic, so prompt, so sincere and so persevering, that it determined them to quit their native country, to renounce the superstitious errors in which they had been brought up, and to pay their homage to a God made man, and promised for so many elapsed ages by the Oracles of Heaven. Far from being swayed by motives of worldly prudence, or deterred by the apparent difficulties and dangers of a long and tedious journey, through deserts and mountains almost impassable, they set out in the midst of a rigorous season, in the very depth of winter, from their brilliant courts and magnificent palaces, attracted by the inward grace that spoke to their hearts, and following the blazing meteor that spoke to their eyes, and guided them, until they at length arrived in Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. On arriving there they might have reasonably supposed that they were come to their journey's end, but they found themselves disappointed and seemingly forsaken by Heaven, the star which had served them as a guide to that royal city having suddenly disappeared from their eyes; however, this trial was not sufficient to induce them to abandon their design, or to lay aside their determined resolution to seek the Redeemer of their souls until they had the happiness to find him; cost what it would, they were resolved to spare no pains, and to leave nothing untried, until they were blessed with the sight of Jesus Christ, and paid him a tribute of their homage; and since the Lord was pleased to try their perseverance, by depriving them of the sight of the heavenly messenger, and of the extraordinary means of information, they thought it incumbent on them to have recourse to the common and ordinary means, that is to say, to the advice and direction of the Jewish Priests, who were appointed by God to be the spiritual guides of his people, and who, though unworthy of their ministry, did not cease to sit in the chair of Moses, and to be the true depositories of religion and the lawful interpreters of the holy Scriptures. The great Council of the Jewish nation, and the Priests and Doctors of the Law, being therefore convened and consulted on this occasion, they replied that Bethlehem was the place which, accord-

ing to the Prophets was to be honoured with the birth of the Messiah. The three wise men acquiesce and submit to their doctrine with the same docility as if God himself had spoken to them. The bad example of the Jewish Priests did not hinder them from believing the great truths which they announced to the people from the chair of truth, because the truths and maxims of religion do not depend on the morals of those who teach and preach them, but spring from an higher source, that is, from the wisdom and veracity of God himself, who knows how to teach and instruct his people, even by the mouth of impious Ministers and unworthy Ecclesiastics.

Jerusalem was thrown into confusion by the news of the arrival of the wise men, yet Jerusalem was not inclined to follow their example : it saw strangers come from the confines of the East to make a tender of their allegiance to the King of the Jews, yet it did not think of paying homage to its own Sovereign, although so near its gates. These foreigners made all Jerusalem resound with this important question, *Where is the King of the Jews?* They even entered the very court of Herod himself with undaunted courage and intrepidity ; fearless of all danger, and disregarding the indignation of a jealous tyrant, and the censures, contempt and derisions of his subjects, they zealously cried out 'and said, *We have seen his star in the East, and we are come to adore him.* This made one of the holy Fathers address them by the following apostrophe : O wise Philosophers ! O skilful Astronomers ! who, laying aside all human respect in the presence of a most cruel King, already infamous for bloodshed, have generously exposed yourselves, and publicly confessed and given glory to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, without the least disguise or dissimulation ! Having departed from Jerusalem on their way to Bethlehem, the Lord, to encourage their faith and zeal, and to direct their travels, was pleased to shew them again the very star which they had seen in the East, and made it march before them till it conducted them to the place where Jesus was, and then it ceased to advance, giving them thereby to understand that this was the happy term of their voyage, and that they had only to enter in order to find the precious treasure which they thirsted after with so much ardour, and had sought with so much care and diligence. The holy men, therefore, entered the poor cottage in transports of spiritual joy, and having found the Divine Babe with his mother, they cast their royal crowns and sceptres at his feet ; they fell on their knees and prostrated themselves in his presence ; they adored him as their Lord, their God and their King, and in acknowledgment of his divinity, humanity and royalty, they offered him their mystical presents of incense, myrrh and gold.

We read in the third book of Kings, c. x. that when the Queen of Saba, on hearing the fame of Solomon's great wisdom, came from the East to Jerusalem in order to see him, she ad-

mired the royal magnificence of his palace, and was astonished at the pomp and grandeur that surrounded his majesty on every side; but the three sages, or Kings of the East, found the King of Kings in a situation very different from that of Solomon; his palace was a low despicable stable; his throne was a manger; his bed was a little hay or straw; his whole retinue consisted of Mary and Joseph; his guards were an ox and an ass. In this humble condition they beheld him, divested of every visible mark of grandeur, ensign of royalty and appearance of divinity. Far, however, from being shocked or scandalized hereat; far from staggering in their faith, or judging by such outward appearances, they believed and confessed him under this humble disguise to be the God of all glory. For this reason, besides the outward presents they made him, they poured forth their souls in his presence in the deepest sense of praise, thanksgiving, charity, devotion, and a total sacrifice of themselves, which he undoubtedly repaid by favours of a much greater excellency, as he presented them with the special gifts of grace. How many instructive lessons does the conduct of these three eastern wise men afford us, my brethren? Should we not like them, draw near in spirit to the infant Jesus, and make him a tender of our hearts, particularly on this great solemnity? Should we not like them, offer him the acceptable presents, first of charity, which is the most excellent of all virtues, as gold is the most precious of all metals; secondly, of devotion, which like a sweet incense rises and ascends to his throne; and thirdly, of mortification, which preserves the soul from the corruption of sin, as myrrh preserves the bodies of the dead which are embalmed with it? Not content with an exterior and superficial adoration, we ought to adore Jesus Christ in spirit and truth, and return thanks to his infinite mercy, for having graciously called us in the persons of the three wise men, to the light of faith and the worship of the true God.—Our ancestors, like unto their ancestors, were heretofore immersed in ignorance and involved in the darkness of infidelity. Our country, like unto the East where they lived, was once overspread with Paganism, and inhabited by a people, bewildered and blinded with the gross errors of idolatry, until God in his great mercy vouchsafed to look down upon them and upon us with compassion, and to bring us over to the wonderful light of divine faith by the splendour of his bright luminary and glorious apostle St. Patrick. If, therefore, we are not Turks, Mahometans, Pagans, or Jews; if we are Christians and Catholics, it is because the Lord has been graciously pleased to manifest and reveal himself to us, and to invite us to the inheritance of his heavenly kingdom; it is because Jesus Christ made his star shine over us, and conferred on us graces similar to those which he conferred on the wise men of the East. To his pure mercy we are indebted for the signal blessing and inestimable benefit of our vocation. He has

vouchsafed to incorporate us in the communion of saints; and to raise us to the dignity of his adoptive children at our spiritual birth by baptism, even before we opened the eyes of our souls to the first dawn of reason. He has placed us within the pale, and in the bosom of his holy Catholic Church, in preference to thousands of others who perhaps would serve him with more fidelity. In this Church there is a perpetual and uninterrupted succession of lawful Pastors, whose duty it is to guide the Israel of God, or to govern and instruct his people, as it is our duty to hear and obey them in all matters concerning faith and morals. When any difficulties arise about the sense and meaning of the sacred Scriptures, we are to observe what was practised by the wise men in Jerusalem, and to submit without opposition to the authority and decisions of the Pastors and Bishops of the Church. This is an invariable rule that preserves unity in faith, and prevents us, as the Apostle speaks, from being tossed to and fro like children by every blast of human opinions and new-fangled religions. In this Church also, Jesus Christ imparts his graces through the channel of the holy sacraments, which he instituted for the sanctification of our souls. Here, as in a mystical Bethlehem, he is spiritually born, found and adored. Here he forms himself in our hearts, according to the expression of the Apostle, and he is adored on our altars. Here he absolves the repenting sinners, who are conducted by the star of his grace to the sacred tribunal of penance. Here he nourishes the souls of the faithful in the holy communion with the bread of Angels, and the heavenly manna of his own precious body and blood, not in a type or figure, but in substance and reality, veiled under the sacramental forms in the venerable Eucharist; so that by receiving it with the proper dispositions, our souls become a kind of happy Bethlehem here on earth, wherein Jesus Christ himself, the source and author of all grace, is as it were newly born, and communicates his heavenly favours and blessings in abundance. Such an effusion of divine mercy, such an excess of charity, calls loudly upon us for the most grateful acknowledgment, and for the most faithful correspondence with the graces bestowed on us by the Lord our God. If in imitation of the three wise men, or Kings of the East, we follow the guidance of the star of grace, and continue to march forward in the straight paths of virtue to the end of our mortal pilgrimage, we may confidently hope to be, at length, conducted with safety into the charming mansions of eternal bliss, where the Son of God is seated on a throne of glory in all the splendor of majesty encompassed with millions of Angels, and adored by all the Saints of the Church triumphant. But if, instead of copying after the noble example that the wise men of the East have set us, we unfortunately resemble Herod and the stiff-necked Jews, we may expect to share in their misfortunes, and to be convinced by woful experience of the dire effects of

God's severe justice. This reflection leads me to the second point of this discourse, and the remaining part of the mystery of this day.

As a star was the divine messenger that announced the Nativity of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles of the East, so an Angel with a choir of heavenly spirits, was the ambassador that announced it first to the shepherds and people of Judea. Herod, and all Jerusalem with him, was alarmed and disturbed at his birth, instead of rejoicing at the happy tidings, and singing canticles of praise to the Lord for causing the Heavens to rain down the just man, as the Scripture expresses it, and the earth to produce the Saviour of mankind; the ambitious King erroneously imagining that the Messiah, who was then expected by the generality of that carnal people under the notion of a temporal Prince, was come to deprive him of his earthly kingdom, considered him as a rival who was to dispute with him the throne he had usurped. Being therefore much agitated and perplexed in his mind, he had recourse to his usual arts of craft and dissimulation, and formed the cruel design of taking away the life of the Divine Infant, and sacrificing him to his restless ambition. This made St. Augustine cry out and say, What will the tribunal of Jesus Christ not do when he shall come with great power and majesty to judge both the living and the dead, if his very crib in the stable of Bethlehem, when he came to be judged, struck such a terror into the proud and haughty King Herod? The tyrant concealed his malicious design under the specious pretext of going himself in person to pay homage to the new-born King of the Jews; for this reason, when he dismissed the wise men from Jerusalem, he gave them a strict charge to return to him after they had found out the child Jesus, and inform him where he was, that he might also go and adore him; but God, who saw his hypocrisy, baffled his wicked projects, by admonishing the wise men not to return any more to him, but to take another road into their own country. It is true, indeed, what Herod projected then the Jews executed afterwards, and thereby sealed their own reprobation. They despised the oracles of Heaven, and rejected the Messiah who had been specially promised to their forefathers; they were unwilling he should reign over them, and blindly preferred the tyrannical dominion of Herod to the sweet yoke of his Gospel. It is no wonder, then, that they ceased to be the chosen people of God; no wonder that, after thus frustrating the designs of his mercy, they felt the severe effects of his justice, and in their turn were rejected and cast off like abortives, in punishment of their obstinacy and perverseness, and on account of their infidelity in not corresponding with the graces which were offered to them. The very priests and doctors in their synagogue, who had instructed the three wise men of the East, and directed them to Jesus Christ, did not profit by their own

instructions, nor avail themselves of that favourable opportunity to seek him in person, and march at the head of the citizens of Jerusalem, as they should have done, to the place of his birth, which they had pointed out to strangers and foreigners. They shut their eyes against the light which they held out to others, and were such slaves to their passions, and so devoted to the world and its corrupt maxims and sinful pleasures, that they would give no admittance in their hearts to the humility of the Messiah, who came not to bestow worldly honours, riches or pleasures on his followers, but to subdue their pride and enrich their souls with heavenly gifts and graces. The synagogue was therefore repudiated; the kingdom of God was taken from the Jews, and given to another nation inhabited by Gentiles, according to these words of Scripture, Mat. c. viii. v. 11. *Many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into exterior darkness.*

It was in the mystery of this great festival that this prediction first began to be verified, to the eternal confusion of Herod and the Jewish nation, whose misfortune should serve as a warning to all sinners not to imitate their example, by rejecting the calls of Heaven, and slighting the favourable opportunities that the Father of mercies offers them to work their salvation. Yet alas! how many followers have they now-a-days, in the very midst of Christianity, who choose rather to remain in the darkness of infidelity, error and vice, than yield to the impressions of grace and follow the guidance of the star that would bring them to the true light? In their hearts they are enemies to the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, blush at the humility of his cross, and by their actions, if not their words, cry out like the people mentioned in ch. ninth of St. Luke, v. 14, *We will not have this man to reign over us*; worse in some measure than Herod himself, who under the pretext of adoring the Son of God, sought an opportunity to take away his life; they *crucify him afresh* by their horrid impieties and reiterated crimes, and *are guilty* of abusing his *body and blood* in the blessed sacrament whenever they receive it unworthily under the mask of piety and the outward appearance of devotion. If Herod sacrificed thousands of holy innocents to his ambition, they sacrifice thousands of innocent victims to their brutal lusts and insatiable passions. Herod only killed the bodies of the infants that were slaughtered by his orders, and deprived them of a short transitory life; his malice, far from hurting their immortal souls, was rather of service to them, as it served, even contrary to the tyrant's intention, to accelerate their real and eternal happiness, and to entitle them to the immediate possession of the laurel of martyrdom and life everlasting; but on the other hand, impious Christians, wicked fathers and mothers, profligate and scandalous sinners, murder and destroy.

the souls of all those whom they scandalize, and are the means of leading astray by their bad example and advice, and may be justly stiled the unhappy instruments of their spiritual ruin and eternal damnation. Behold, my brethren, the subject of the tears and lamentations of our holy mother the Church ; this is what renders her inconsolable, like another Rachael, bewailing the loss and reprobation of so many of her refractory children, who are so unfortunate as to shut their ears and harden their hearts against her salutary admonitions.

It is the general opinion of spiritual writers, that of all the inhabitants of the East, the three Kings, or wise men, were the only three that were chosen to be the first predestined of the Gentiles, because they were the only three that we find to have followed the guidance of the star. It undoubtedly called them all to the light of faith, and was seen by many other nations of the East : but the generality of the people contented themselves with gazing upon it and admiring its uncommon brightness, without taking any pains to seek him whom that star announced and preached to them ; hence they died in their infidelity, whilst a small number that answered the divine call was ranked amongst the elect ; so true it is, that *many are called, but few are chosen*, because few are faithful in corresponding with the graces of God ; few are as attentive as they ought to be, to those gracious lights and divine inspirations, which invite and call upon them to enter into the narrow road, that leads to the possession of Jesus Christ and the enjoyment of life everlasting. In short, few imitate the promptitude, the active and undaunted zeal and steadiness of the three wise men. Sinners in general abuse the goodness of God, despise the riches of his mercy, and put off their conversion from day to day, thus exposing themselves to the danger of being deprived of the favours of Heaven, in just punishment of their indolence, sloth and perverseness. We should not be dismayed, my brethren, in the pursuit of virtue, nor disconcerted at the trials and obstacles we may happen to meet, but courageously surmount all the difficulties that seem to obstruct our pious enterprise. If we have the misfortune to lose Jesus and his grace, by falling into sin, we are to seek him without delay ; we are to fly to the mystical Bethlehem of the Church, and search for him with diligence and perseverance in the asylum of mercy, in the sacred tribunal of penance. One star was sufficient to instruct, persuade and convert the wise men of the East ; and should not the many stars of grace that we are favoured with, suffice to persuade us to a proper sense of our duty ? The good examples of piety and religion, which, notwithstanding the deplorable depravity of the age, we have continually before our eyes ; the edifying sermons and exhortations that are frequently preached to us from the chair of truth ; the books of piety that we read ; the wholesome counsels and advices that are charitably given to us ; the good thoughts, inward remorse

of conscience and secret inspirations that we perceive in our souls, are so many lights and stars of vocation that invite and solicit us to renounce our evil ways, to quit our vicious habits, to depart from the broad road of perdition, and re-enter the paths of virtue. When, like the three wise men of the East, we have the comfort and happiness to find Jesus the Redeemer of our souls, we are to follow the advice that the Lord was pleased to give them, *not to return any more to Herod, but to march forward towards their native country, by a different road from that which they had come.* We are not to hold any farther correspondence with the enemies of Jesus Christ; we are to take care not to relapse into our former disorders, not to return any more to our past sins, but to begin a new course of life, and make the best of our way to our native home and heavenly country. We are to march on forward towards that happy land of promise by a quite different road from that by which we have unhappily strayed away from it, and have been blindly led into a long train of errors.

Such, my dear brethren, are the important instructions that the great mystery of this day affords us; let us not, therefore, receive the grace of God in vain. Let us render a thousand thanks to his infinite mercy for the signal benefit of our vocation to the Christian religion. Let us glorify the ever-blessed Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for having vouchsafed to distinguish us from pagans and idolators by the light of the Gospel; from unbelievers by a submission to his Church; from abandoned sinners by the efficacy of his holy sacraments. Let us devoutly prostrate ourselves before our Divine Redeemer, who humbled himself so low, as to descend from the highest Heavens, and to be born in the stable of Bethlehem for our sake. If we have not the *gold* of perfect charity, nor the *frankincense* of an inflamed and fervent devotion to offer, let us at least present him with the *myrrh* of a bitter sorrow and compunction for our past offences. Let us make him a tender of our hearts, and of the three faculties of our souls, our memory, understanding and will. Praise, honour and glory be to thee for ever, O adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost! Accept our hearts as a thanksgiving-offering for the numberless favours and blessings we have received from thy bounty. Thou knowest our poverty, and that we have nothing worthy of thy acceptance; nothing but what, on a thousand titles, already belongs to thee. Thou askest nothing but our heart, and this we most willingly offer to thee without reserve, and consecrate entirely to thy service. We offer thee our memory, that it may be ever recollected in thee; our understanding, that it may always be enlightened or directed by thy truth; and our will, that it may be ever conformable to thy divine will. Vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to guide our steps, that we may henceforward walk in the paths of virtue and the way of thy precepts, during the course of our mortal pilgrimage here on earth, as

by so doing we may hope, through thy mercy, to be admitted hereafter to the possession of the kingdom of thy eternal glory. Which I wish ye all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EPIPHANY.

On the Duties of Children to their Parents.

Venit Nazareth et erat subditus illis.—*Luc. c. ii. v. 51.*

The child Jesus came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.—Luke, c. ii. v. 51.

THE Gospel of this day furnishes us with several instructive lessons of piety, zeal, charity, humility and obedience. In the first place, the piety and devotion of the people of God in observing all the festivals ordained by the Mosaic Law, is worthy of our imitation, and ought to confound the sloth and indolence of many Christians, who are but to profane the Sundays and Holydays, which in the New Law are particularly consecrated to the divine worship. The Jews had but one Temple, or common place of public worship in Jerusalem, to denote the Unity of God; and they were accustomed to repair every year to that Temple from all parts of the holy land; in order to eat their paschal lamb, and to solemnize the great festival of the Passover, which was instituted in memory of, and in thanksgiving for their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. The blessed Virgin Mary and her most chaste spouse St. Joseph, were too religious and exemplary to neglect submitting themselves to this pious institution. They went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Passover, and brought with them the divine infant Jesus, in order to present him to the Lord. The first oblation they made of him in the Temple happened on the thirty-third day after the day of his circumcision inclusively, when the days of the immaculate Virgin's purification were expired; for though she stood in no need of being purified, as she was full of grace and blessed among women, yet through a surprizing effect of her profound humility, she submitted herself to the Mosaic Law, and offered for her dearly beloved son, a pair of turtles or two young pigeons in the Temple, this being the sacrifice that was then required from the poorer sort. The Scripture gives no farther account of the infancy of our blessed Saviour from this time until he was twelve years old, except that he grew up and was strengthened full of wisdom, and the grace of God was in him.

When he was twelve years old, having gone to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and having tarried there for the space of seven days, until the ceremony was over, he absconded himself, for the glory of his heavenly Father, from Joseph and Mary, who imagined him to be in the company of their relations and friends, that were returning from the solemnity to their respective abodes.

But after one day's journey, having perceived their mistake, and having made a close inquiry among their acquaintances, they could get no intelligence of him, wherefore they returned to Jerusalem without delay, full of grief and anxiety, searching for the child Jesus, whom they found the third day, to their inexpressible joy, sitting among the Doctors in the Temple, proposing and answering questions concerning the law of God, to the great astonishment of all that were present, particularly of his blessed Mother, who said unto him, *Son, why didst thou so unto us? Behold, thy father and I with grief were seeking thee.* The love and regard he had for them made him desist from the sacred employment wherein he was engaged, and return at their request to Nazareth, where he led a retired and humble life in a poor cottage, until he was thirty years old, unknown to all in the mean while, but obedient and submissive to Joseph and Mary, under whose care he advanced in wisdom and age, and in grace both before God and man. These are the contents of this day's Gospel, in which we are to observe that the grief which the Blessed Virgin conceived when, without any fault of her's, she lost her beloved son, and the solicitude with which she immediately sought him until she found him in the Temple, teaches us, that if we have the misfortune to lose Jesus, and forfeit his grace by mortal sin, we are not to put off our conversion from day to day, but are bound to have recourse to his mercy by a speedy repentance, and to seek him in the Temple among the Ministers of the Lord, by approaching the Sacrament of Penance with a sorrowful heart, and not suffering, if possible, a moment to intervene betwixt our rise and our fall, as delays are always dangerous, and every moment may be our last. Joseph and Mary are also a noble pattern for all parents to copy after; as on the other hand, the conduct of the child Jesus is a model for all children, and points out to them the love, respect, obedience and submission which they owe to their parents. It is on the duties of children to their parents that I purpose to expatiate in the following discourse, after we shall have invoked the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, saying with the Angel, *Ave Maria.*

Although the pastors of our souls, and all lawful superiors, both spiritual and temporal, are comprehended under the name of *Parents*, according to the Scripture stile, yet our natural parents are principally understood by the words *Father* and *Mother*; it is to them we are indebted, next under God, for our lives and being, our support and education; for which

reason the duties of children to their parents are ranked in the Scripture next after our duty to God, and placed at the head of the commandments of the second table of the Divine Law which relate to our neighbour. *Honour thy father and thy mother*, says the Lord, *that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord God will give to thee*, Exod. c. xx. Nature, as well as religion inculcates this obligation, and teaches us that nothing is more reasonable or more just than that children should honour those who brought them into the world with much labour and pain, and reared them with great trouble, anxiety and solicitude. This honour includes several particular duties, the chief of which are love and respect, submission and obedience, help and assistance.

The first duty is to love their parents, for *a child that does not love his parents*, as St. Peter Chrysologus says, *is rather a monster of nature than a child*, since nature inspires the very irrational animals themselves with the like instinct of love. The love children are to have for their parents must not be a mere natural affection, but a rational and christian love, according to God; that is, they are to love them in God and for God; we are commanded to love our neighbour in this manner, much more so our parents; we are to pray for their spiritual good, and beg of God to grant them a long, happy, and peaceable life, that his grace may support them in their difficulties, direct their ways, and crown their labours with eternal bliss. How unnatural then, and how inhuman must those children be who bear a hatred in their hearts to their parents, who curse them and wish them evil, who shorten their days by grief and vexation, and bring their grey hairs to the grave before their time? How ungrateful, how perverse and barbarous are they who long to get rid of their parents, and wish for their death in order to become their own masters and inherit what they possess? Is it not the height of impiety to rejoice at the death of those whom God was pleased to make the authors and instruments of the very life we enjoy? If the Scripture says, 1 Jo. iii. 15, that *he who hates his brother is a murderer* in his heart, with how much reason may such unnatural children be called parricides? *He that curses his father or his mother, dying let him die*, says the Lord, Levit. ch. xx. v. 9; and again, in ch. xx. v. 20, of the Book of Proverbs, *He that curses his father and mother, his lamp shall be extinguished in the midst of darkness, and the inheritance hastily gotten in the beginning, shall want a blessing in the latter end*; for such evil wishes and monstrous behaviour draw down the anger of God upon wicked children, and often provoke the Almighty not only to prevent the temporal enjoyment they thirst after, but also to *extinguish their lamp in the midst of darkness*, that is, to cut them off the face of the earth in the midst of their sins.

The second duty of children to their parents is to bear a great respect to them, not only inwardly in their hearts, but also outwardly in their words and carriage; they are to

respect them as God's vicegerents, and their superiors in wisdom, age and authority; they are to respect not only their persons, but likewise their instructions, admonitions and reprehensions. *Hearken my son*, says the wise man, Prov. i. *to the instructions of thy father, and depart not from the law of thy mother, that grace may be added to thy head, and a chain of gold to thy neck.* This respect must be testified by a cheerful and ready compliance with their directions; it must be both interior and exterior; it must be rendered, not out of habit or custom, or a mere servile fear, but upon a principle of conscience, with an intent of honouring and respecting God in the person of our parents, who govern us in God's place. Children are to pay a great deference to their judgments, submit to their corrections, and acquiesce to their orders without contradiction; they are to receive their instructions with humility, hearken to their advice with attention, and never betray the least contempt of them by their words, looks, gestures or actions. When their parents are advanced in years, or grown infirm, feeble and peevish, children are to take particular care not to spurn, mock or deride them, not to reproach them with their failings in a contemptuous manner, not to expose their ill humours and weaknesses, nor to abandon and disown them, because they are in poverty and subject to some imperfections; on the contrary, it is then that children ought to treat their parents with an extraordinary tenderness, bear their infirmities with christian patience, and most carefully avoid whatever may give them any occasion of trouble or affliction. Tobias's wife had not the reputation of sanctity, nor Solomon's mother an untainted character, yet Tobias commanded his son to honour his mother all the days of her life, and Solomon never failed in his respect to Bathsheba. We read in the third Book of Kings, c. ii. that when his mother came to him, he rose from his throne, went to meet her, and placed her on a royal throne at his right hand. In like manner we read, Genes. c. xlv. that Joseph, though raised to the dignity of Viceroy of all Egypt, was so far from being ashamed to own his poor old father Jacob before the King and the whole Court, that he had no sooner understood that he was coming to Egypt but he mounted his chariot and went to meet him, and having seen him he cast himself upon his knees, and mixed his embraces with tears. His high dignity did not raise him above his duty, nor did the meanness of his father's condition lessen his respect in the least as long as he lived. At, and after his decease, Joseph paid him the last tribute of filial piety in the most respectful manner; for, as the Scripture informs us, he rushed towards his bed to embrace him when he was dying, he fell on his face with sorrow, he kissed him with the most tender affection, he wept in the bitterness of his soul, and took particular care to have his body embalmed according to the custom of the country, and to see it carried with pomp and Royal magnificence into the land of Canaan, and

interred with honour in the tomb of his ancestors. Behold here a noble lesson for children, never to abandon their parents in the hour of distress, or neglect them when they stand in need of comfort and relief. Whenever they happen to do any thing, even inadvertently, that displeases or offends their parents, it is their duty to be really troubled hereat, to ask pardon without delay, and to be afterwards more circumspect in avoiding whatever they know will contristate them. It is a mark of a child's respect to beg the blessing of his father and mother upon his bended knees. The blessing of a parent was thought so much of in the Old Testament, that it was sought for with tears and the most fervent entreaties. Esau, though a married man, was not ashamed to be seen begging his father Isaac's blessing with streams of tears. Jacob begged and obtained his father's blessing, by which means the blessings of Heaven and earth were bestowed upon him and his posterity in great abundance; hence the Holy Ghost says, Eccl. c. iii. *The blessing of a father establishes the house (or family) of the children; but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation.* It is another mark of children's respect to ask their parent's advice, and consult with them in all difficulties and matters of importance, particularly when they deliberate about choosing a state of life. After consulting God, and imploring the light of Heaven to direct their ways, they are, according to divines, strictly bound in conscience to consult their parents, and to ask their consent and blessing before they engage in the married state; and their parents are bound on their part, not to be unreasonable in refusing their concurrence and approbation; they are not to force the inclinations of their children, nor to compel them to marry against their will, or become ecclesiastics without a vocation from God, or hinder them if they have a true vocation. The Council of Trent, Sess. xxv. c. 18. excommunicates those who, directly or indirectly, force others to enter a religious order, or hinder them from it when they are willing and well disposed. We read in ch. xxiv. & xxviii. of Genesis, that the great Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, took wives of their parents' choosing; and again in the same Book we find, that Esau sinned in marrying one of the daughters of Canaan, because without any just cause he had done a thing which he knew would give much grief and affliction to his father Isaac.

As love and respect are the two first duties, so the third duty of children to their parents is *obedience*, of which St. Paul says, Eph. vi. *Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just*; and again, Coloss. iii. *Obey your parents in all things, for this is pleasing to God.* Obedience is a just and natural consequence of the power which God and nature have given to parents with regard to their children; their power is a power to command, which is acknowledged by obedience. The Scripture says, 1 Kings, c. xv. that *obedience is better than sacrifice*, on which text St. Gregory writes thus: *With reason obedience is preferred to sacrifice, because by sacrifice the flesh of some*

animal, or some other exterior thing, is immolated, but by obedience our own will is offered and sacrificed to God. Children are bound to obey in all things that their parents command in the Lord, or according to the Lord, that is, in all things that are not sinful, or that are consistent with the law of God; for as he is our chief and principal father, all commands that contradict his, are void and of no force: *Then alone, says St. Augustine, Sermon lxx. in Ps. 70. n. 2. must children not obey their father when he commands any thing against the Lord their God;* in this case they are obliged to obey God rather than man, as Paul speaks, Acts, c. xxix. v. 5. They ought indeed with all possible respect to make a submissive remonstrance to their parents, and beg to be excused, declaring their readiness to obey, if they could do it without offending the Lord, or saying with the Apostles, Acts iv. when they were forbid to do what God ordered, *Judge yourselves if it be just, to obey your orders rather than the orders of God.* Hence it follows, that it was not lawful for Jonathan to obey his father Saul, when he commanded him to deliver up David to be put to death, 1 Kings, c. xx. nor was it lawful for Herod's daughter to obey her wicked mother Herodias, when she commanded her to petition for the head of St. John the Baptist, Mar. c. vi. v. 24. By the same rule children are not obliged, in obedience to their parents, to sacrifice their eternal happiness to a worldly interest, or to hazard their salvation by marrying persons of a different religious persuasion, and exposing their posterity to the danger of being brought up in errors contrary to divine faith. In like manner, the obedience children owe their parents does not oblige them to keep from embracing a religious state when God calls them to it, and their parents unjustly oppose their vocation, as St. Augustine observes in his writings against Adimantus, who was so impious as to censure the Gospel for that reason, and to say that it was contrary to the Law of God in that point; wherefore the holy doctor replied, that the Gospel does not forbid children to render to parents the honour and obedience that are due to them, but only forbids them to be honoured or obeyed more than God; for he that says, *Honour thy father and thy mother;* says also, Matt. x. *He that loves his father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.* It is in this sense that the following words of our Saviour, Luke chap. xiv. verse 26, are to be understood, *He that hateth not his father and his mother, cannot be my disciple;* for to hate them is to be deaf to them, inasmuch as they go between us and God, and are for withdrawing us from the divine service, though at the same time we are to love and honour them always as our parents; hence we read, Luke c. ii. v. 49. of Christ himself, that though he was submissive and obedient to Joseph and Mary, yet when his blessed Mother had found him in the Temple among the Doctors, and had said, *Son, why has thou done so to us?* He replied, *Did ye not know that I must be employed about the things that are my father's?* teaching us hereby, that

those who are called to labour in the Lord's vineyard are not to be over-ruled by flesh and blood in the discharge of their spiritual duties and the sacred functions of their state:

Children are therefore to regard in their parents the authority of their heavenly Father, and to put no other bounds to their obedience than what the law of God does. They ought to obey cheerfully, without grumbling or muttering. To render their obedience an act of virtue; they ought to obey, not merely through a natural inclination, or out of a servile fear of punishment or hope of some temporal reward, but upon a Christian motive, and with a view of pleasing God, because it is just and agreeable to him, because it is God that commands them to obey, and because in obeying their parents they obey God's orders, and in disobeying them they disobey God, who commands and speaks to them through the mouths of their parents. The example of Jesus Christ should induce them the more readily to comply with this important duty, not only in their childhood, but even when they are advanced in years. All that the Gospel tells us of his life from the age of twelve years, when he was found in the Temple, till the age of thirty years, when he appeared in public, is, that *he went down to Nazareth, and was subject and obedient to Joseph and Mary*. In obedience to his mother's desire he wrought his first miracle at the marriage of Cana, though otherwise *his hour was not come*, Jo. ii. 4. and with his dying words he recommended her to the care of his beloved disciple. O, how will his example confound undutiful children at the last day! How will it condemn them who are refractory to their parents' orders—who by their stubbornness and disobedience make their parents' hearts ache, and are the means of cutting their days short! St. Paul, Rom. ii. and Tim. ii. 3. ranks such children in the list of the greatest sinners, and classes their disobedience amongst the abominations of the Gentiles, which exclude from the kingdom of Heaven.

The fourth duty of children is to assist their parents in their necessities, both spiritual and temporal, as far as they are able: this is so strict an obligation, that it would be a grievous sin to apply, even to pious uses, or give to the church what is wanting for the support of parents. For this reason our blessed Saviour blames the Jews, Matt. c. xv. for leaving their parents in want, under the pretext of making offerings for them and giving gifts to the Temple. The angelical Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, speaking of this obligation, says, that in case of extreme necessity, a son is bound to help his parents even before his own children; he also teaches, that though the obedience he owes them does not oblige him to omit embracing a religious state, in condescension to their orders, yet their wants may oblige him thereto; so that it is unlawful for a son who has poor parents, that cannot be supported without his assistance, to retire from the world into a monastery and leave them to the care of Provi-

dence, because this would be tempting God, as it would be wilfully neglecting the human means whereby they might be relieved, and endangering the life of his parents upon the hopes of divine assistance. Charity and mercy are more acceptable to God in this case than sacrifice, for which reason the Lord declares, Eccl. iii. 15. *that the mercy which is shewn to a poor parent shall never be forgotten.* We have a remarkable example of this filial piety in young Tobias, who by the labour of his hands and the sweat of his brow maintained his father, and served him with care and indefatigable love in his old age, after he had lost his sight by an accident, which God's providence permitted, in order to exercise the patience of the father and the piety of the son. We have a far more noble example in the person of our blessed Saviour, who, ready to expire on the cross, forgot not this filial duty, but recommended his virginal mother to his beloved disciple St. John, interrupting, as I may say, for a moment, that great sacrifice, in order to provide for her; for in saying to St. John, *Behold thy mother,* he charged him to take as much care of her as if she was his real mother; he considered her then, not as his creature to whom he had given life, but as his parent who had given him birth; and therefore, as he was then leaving the world, he put her, as it were, under the care of another son, recommending by his example, to all pious children, the continual care of their parents, as St. Augustine observes, Tract. cxv. in Jo. Hence St. Paul, 1 Tim. viii. says, *That if any one has not care of those that belong to him, and particularly of his domestics, he has lost his faith and is worse than an infidel;* nay, he is worse than the beasts, who, as St. Ambrose remarks, are taught by nature to perform this duty, and to feed and cherish the old ones when they are unable to provide for themselves, Hex. l. v. c. 16. and really, if it be a grievous sin to neglect assisting and relieving strangers in their distress, how much more grievous a sin must it be to neglect succouring our parents under the pressures of want and poverty? At our birth we are helpless, and even more miserable than any other living creature; we cannot do the smallest thing in our infancy to serve and assist ourselves. As our parents provide, then, all necessities for our relief and preservation when we are unable to help ourselves, Divine Providence has ordered that in return we should assist, relieve and comfort our parents in their old age, when they are visited with infirmity, and labour under the various inconveniences, wants and grievances which usually attend old age. Their spiritual necessities are no less to be attended to, and every proper means is to be made use of for procuring the eternal salvation of their souls; their last will is to be faithfully fulfilled after their death, and their just and lawful debts are to be paid, as far as the effects they have left will allow; and if they unjustly detained the property of others, restitution is to be made of it by the children who inherit their worldly substance.

These are the principal duties of children to their parents; and to enforce a faithful compliance with them the more effectually, the Lord has been pleased to annex a promise to the fourth commandment, which he has not annexed to any of the other nine, *Honour thy father and thy mother*, he says, *that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God will give to thee.*

The Scripture scarce ever mentions this commandment, without promising a long and prosperous life to such as duly observe it. This was the reward God promised the Jews, who being a carnal people, were to be drawn to their duty by a worldly and temporal recompence, such as might work on their senses and gratify their present inclinations: but to Christians he promises a nobler reward, that is, length of days in the true land of the living, or in the kingdom of Heaven; for the temporal blessing that was promised to children in the old Law, was only a figure of the blessings of the new Law, wherein the Lord adds an eternal to a temporal reward, and promises to recompence filial piety both in this life and in the life to come. It is true, pious and dutiful children do not always live to see old age, but often die in their youthful days; and, on the contrary, it happens sometimes that disobedient and undutiful children are permitted to live long, that they may have the more time to be converted; but we are not therefore to imagine that God is worse than his word, or that he breaks his promise when he takes pious and dutiful children to himself. This is an effect of his love and mercy to them; this is giving them a greater blessing instead of a lesser; this is only changing a mortal life into an immortal; this is only conferring on them a more signal favour and a more precious reward, it being much better to enjoy a short life in this world, and to die in the flower of youth and innocence, than to grow grey in wickedness. The Lord, who has a foreknowledge of all things that are to happen, foresees that if some pious and dutiful children were to live longer in this sinful world, they would make a shipwreck of their virtues and be corrupted by ill example. To prevent this misfortune, and to preserve them from the danger of eternal ruin and destruction, he takes them often to himself in their innocence, before they leave the path of virtue, according to these words of Scripture, Sap. iv. 11. where the Holy Ghost, speaking of the death of a virtuous youth, says, *He was taken away lest malice should change his understanding, and lest deceit should beguile his soul.* Moreover, virtuous children are sometimes called out of this life in a tender age, that they may not be involved in the public calamities and miseries of the times, according to that saying of Isaías, c. lvii. 1. *From the face of malice the just is gathered away, that he may not see evil.* As to disobedient and undutiful children, they are often punished with a short and sinful life, and a bad and untimely death. In the old Law, God expressly ordered them

to be stoned to death by all the people, as we read, Deuteron. c. xxi. This Law, indeed, is no longer in force, nor executed as formerly, yet, as the sin is still the same, and equally offensive to God, there is no doubt but it deserves the same punishment, and that several undutiful and stubborn children, by a just judgment of God, are still carried off by an untimely and unprovided death, though this may escape our notice as being ignorant of the cause. We have frightful instances hereof in the sons of Heli and in unhappy Absalom, who, after the murder of his brother Amon, rebelled against King David his father, raised an army to dethrone him, and banished him out of Jerusalem; but the justice of God pursuing him, his army was defeated, and he himself was hung by the hair of his head on an oak tree, and suddenly cut off the face of the earth in the bloom of life and in the height of his sins, leaving a terrifying example to future ages of God's justice and anger against all disobedient and rebellious children. Hence we read so many dreadful curses pronounced against them in the sacred Scriptures: *Cursed is he, says the Lord, Deut. c. xxvii. that does not honour his father; and again, Eccl. c. iii. 18. He is cursed by God that exasperates his mother; and Prov. c. xxx. 17. He that mocks his father, let his eye be picked out by the ravens of the brooks, and let the young eagles eat it.* The Book of Genesis, c. ix. v. 25, relates, that Cham, the son of Noah, for laughing at his father, brought a most dreadful curse upon a great part of his posterity. Should we not then conclude, my brethren, that it is not only the indispensable duty, but also the great interest of all children, to honour and respect their parents in the manner already described, and that it is highly incumbent on those who have been heretofore deficient herein, to repent in time before they fall into the hands of God's avenging justice. O God of mercy and Father of all consolation, who dost not desire the death of a sinner, but that he may be converted and live, pardon our past misdeemeanors, and give us all grace to begin a new life with the beginning of this new year. Grant that we may divest ourselves of the corruption of the old man; and cast off the works of darkness. Inspire us with a lively sense of our respective duties, that we may fulfil them to thy greater honour and glory, to the edification of our neighbour, and to the eternal salvation of our souls. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, &c. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

On Matrimony, and the principal duties of Husbands and Wives.

Nuptiæ factæ sunt in Cana Galilee.—*Jo. c. ii. v. 1.*

There was a Marriage at Cana of Galilee.—John, c. ii. v. 1.

MATRIMONY is one of the states which compose the Church; it is in the order of Providence and nature, the general and most ordinary state of those who live in the world; it was originally instituted by Almighty God as a natural contract between our first parents in the earthly Paradise, Gen. ii. This institution was confirmed by Christ our Lord in the New Testament, Mat. xix. 4, 5, 6, and he was pleased to honour it with his own presence, and with his first miracle, wrought at the marriage of Cana, to shew that the state of matrimony is holy in itself, honourable in all respects, and has God himself for its author; nay, our Lord not only ratified and honoured matrimony in this manner, but also elevated it to the dignity of one of the seven sacraments of the new Law, and as such it has always been acknowledged in the Catholic Church. St. Paul, Eph. c. v. v. 32, expressly calls it a *great sacrament and mystery with regard to Christ and his Church*; for as it is a conjunction made and sanctified by God himself, and not to be dissolved by any power of man, according to that saying of our Lord, Matt. xix. v. 6, *What God has joined together, let no man put asunder*. It is a sacred sign or mysterious representation of the indissoluble union of Christ and his Church, and of the spiritual nuptials and conjunction of his divinity with the humanity in the adorable mystery of the incarnation.

Hence it follows that Christians, who are inclined to receive this *great sacrament* worthily, and to engage in the holy state of matrimony, which is not to be dissolved but by death, should proceed with the most mature deliberation, and approach it with proper dispositions; they should, in imitation of the married pair mentioned in this day's gospel, take care to invite Jesus and Mary to their wedding, that is, they ought to put up their fervent prayers to Heaven, and beseech God, the giver of all good counsel, to guide and direct their steps, and make known to them the way wherein they are to walk, as the Royal Prophet speaks, Ps. cxlii. In short, they ought to form to themselves a good intention, and be free from mortal sin,

lest, by a sacrilegious abuse and profanation of a divine institution, they might receive, instead of a blessing, their own condemnation, with evident danger of entailing on themselves an endless train of unspeakable miseries. Their eternal happiness, as well as their temporal felicity, depends on the measures they adopt in the beginning of their career, and on a faithful compliance with the obligations which they contract, for which reason it is a matter of great importance for them to be well instructed in the rules that religion prescribes to be observed, both before and after contracting matrimony. This is the plan and design of the following discourse. The duties of those who are unmarried, but wish to *marry in the Lord*, shall be the subject of the first point. The duties of those who are already married, shall be the subject of the second point: Let us, as usual, invoke the intercession of the blessed Virgin, greeting her with the Archangel Gabriel, *Ave Maria, &c.*

When Christians are about entering into a particular state of life, it is incumbent on them, before they make their choice, to consult God the Father of lights, and take a serious view of the different states that are established in the world, and marked out by Divine Providence as so many different roads for conducting mankind to the happy end for which they have been created. Salvation, it is true, is attainable in all lawful states, but as every person is not qualified for every particular state, it is no less true that the very same state which would be a means to sanctify one, might prove the ruin and destruction of another, who would rashly and inconsiderately rush into it without sufficient strength and abilities to bear the heavy burdens, and discharge the weighty obligations thereto annexed. The state of perpetual celibacy and virginity is undoubtedly a more sublime, a more holy, and a more perfect state than that of matrimony; Christ our Lord, when on earth, shewed a particular love for virginity, and for those who embraced it; he would have none but the purest of virgins for his mother; he ever manifested a special love to his virgin disciple St. John, who, on that account, was called the beloved disciple; and at his death he recommended his virgin mother to none but his virgin disciple. In c. xix. of St. Matthew he also recommended virginity in the strongest terms, and in c. xx. v. 30. compared virgins to the Angels themselves, saying, *that at the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be married, but be like the Angels of God in Heaven.* In like manner the inspired Apostle St. Paul, both by his word and example, strongly recommends virginity, and represents it in the most amiable light in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, c. vii. concluding thus: *He that giveth his virgin in marriage doeth well, but he that giveth her not, doeth better,* v. 38. however, all things are not fit or expedient for all persons, as all the members of Christ's mystical body, the Church, have not the same vocation nor the same function, according to the remark of the Apostle, *Every one*

has his particular gift from God, one after this manner, another after that ; wherefore every one that is free and disengaged should embrace that rank and state which, after a prudent investigation, he has just reason to believe is assigned for him by Divine Providence as the fittest and most likely for him to work his salvation in. Every state is attended with its own peculiar duties and obligations, which require the succour of peculiar graces to enable a Christian to fulfil them well ; and as God, in the ordinary course of his Providence, does not grant those succours to such as reject the vocation he inspires them with, and withdraw themselves from his gracious designs, so on the contrary he bestows his heavenly favours and blessings on those who answer his divine call, and submit to his holy will and disposal, in order to enable them to live up to their vocation and surmount every difficulty that occurs in their way.

The intention and motives for engaging in the holy state of matrimony, are to be agreeable to the great designs for which matrimony has been instituted and ordained, both as a natural contract and as a sacrament. The chief and principal end of Christian marriages is to supply the Church on earth with good members, and to people the kingdom of Heaven hereafter with Saints, which made St. Augustine say, that the intention of the faithful in marrying should be to give children to the Church and servants to God, who may love and serve him in this world, and complete the number of his elect in Heaven. Such were the pious sentiments of young Tobias when he said, *You know, O Lord, that I marry, not for self-gratification, or any such sinister views, but only for the sake of posterity, that they may bless and praise thy name for all eternity.* Wo be to those who exclude God from their minds, and are actuated by no other motive than sensuality and the gratification of their passions ; for as the Archangel Raphael said to Tobias, *the devil has power over them*, which was the unhappy case of the seven successive husbands of the virtuous Sara, who, as the Scripture relates, were killed on this very account, by the permission of God, the first night of their respective marriages.

Those who are under the care and jurisdiction of their parents, before they embark on this perilous voyage for life, should obtain their consent and blessing. Regularly speaking, they are bound, under pain of incurring a grievous sin, to consult them on their choice, and not to dispose of themselves in marriage without their previous knowledge. *My son, says Eccles. c. xxxii. do nothing without counsel, and thou wilt not repent of what thou hast done.* Esau is justly blamed in the Scripture for not having paid this respect to his parents. It is a duty that religion, prudence, gratitude, and even nature itself demands of children ; and parents on their part are bound not to force their children's inclinations, and not to be

unreasonable in withholding or refusing their consent. Marriages within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity or kindred, are not to be readily agreed to. It is not the Spirit of God, but avarice, that usually makes up such marriages betwixt relations, for which reason we seldom see them blessed by God, but almost always punished with sterility, or with some other temporal adversities and tribulations. The surest way to draw down the blessing of heaven upon the contracting parties, is to be obedient to the laws of God and his Church, and to be free from all impediments which either annul the marriage or render it unlawful. They should be averse to all private and clandestine contracts, as being productive of very great evils, and frequently the fatal source of horrid perjuries, endless disputes, confusion and scandal. Marriages with persons of a different religion are strictly prohibited by the civil laws, and are apt to occasion disquiet and dissensions in families; they are often attended with great danger of perversion, or of not being allowed the free exercise of religion; hence God forbid his people in the old Law to contract such alliances with the Canaanites; and the Scripture informs us, that Solomon, with all his wisdom, was led into the abominations of idolatry by marrying infidels.

In short, the Church directs her children to approach the Sacrament of Penance and the Holy Communion devoutly, two or three days before the day appointed for celebrating their nuptials, and to beware of every thing that is inconsistent with that decency, modesty and sanctity, which become Christians at all times, but especially on so sacred and so solemn an occasion. Did they but follow the directions, and observe the rules of piety that religion prescribes previous to their marriage, we would not afterwards hear of the many broils, scandals, jealousies, animosities, and implacable hatreds, which but too frequently render the married state a kind of hell upon earth, and the high road to the hell of the damned hereafter. But alas! the generality of mankind launch into the turbulent ocean of the world without the necessary precautions and proper dispositions; they take a false step in the beginning, and the farther they go the farther they stray away from their journey's end. They consult no other guides but their blind passions, and seem to look upon matrimony, not as a state of sanctity, but as a mere temporal affair, a simple ceremony, a pure negotiation and a mercenary traffic. For the other sacraments they prepare themselves with some sentiments of religion, but this sacrament they receive, not upon a motive of virtue, but for human considerations, for avarice and worldly interest, nay often in the actual state and affection of mortal sin. How then can they expect a blessing from God, when they begin thus, not in his name, but rather in the name of Satan? How can they hope to partake of the special auxiliary graces that the Sacrament of

Matrimony confers on the worthy receivers, in order to alleviate the burdens of their state, and make them happy both in this world and in the next, when they render themselves totally unworthy of such heavenly favours by a sacrilegious abuse of a divine institution? May I not justly say, my brethren; that such irreligious conduct is one of the fatal sources of several unhappy marriages in our days? But let us now investigate what are the principal obligations and duties, subsequent to the contract of matrimony.

The duties of those who are joined in the bonds of holy wedlock are many and great, but their reward will also be great and glorious in Heaven, if they continue faithfully to fulfil them to the end of their life. The principal view which they ought to have with regard to one another, is to contribute all in their power to render each other happy both in this life and in the life to come. Whilst Christians lead a single life they are free from the many cares, solitudes, avocations and distractions that attend the married state; they have only to think of acquiring happiness for themselves, except what the common duties of charity and the particular rights of society require of them towards all men in general; but when two are joined together in marriage, they are no longer to be considered as separate persons, having separate views and interests, but as two joined together for mutual help and mutual good, in the strictest bond of union that can possibly exist between two persons in this world, and consequently they are bound by every tie to wish and promote each other's felicity as their own. *A man shall leave his father and mother, says the Almighty God, Gen. ii. v. 24. and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.* St. Paul also says, 1 Cor. vii. *A woman is bound by the law so long as her husband liveth.* If two single persons disagree with each other they have a remedy, as they may separate and seek their happiness in the society of a more agreeable friend; but the union of a married couple is so strong, that nothing but the death of one of the contracting parties can dissolve the bond of their marriage; it is the work of God, and no power of man can break it. They should therefore make it their constant study to live united together in mutual love, peace and harmony, during life, and to have but one heart and one mind in the Lord, as if they were but one and the same person: this is what is signified by the ceremony of joining their hands together at the time of their contract, and by putting a ring, which has no end, on the finger of the bride, that she may have her duty, as it were, always before her eyes, and be constantly reminded of the endless love, and perpetual fidelity which the married pair owe to each other. Without a sincere love it is impossible for them to continue long in peace and concord, and without peace and concord they cannot expect to enjoy any true Christian happiness. Hence St. Paul, Eph. c. v. v. 25. says, *Husbands*

love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church; that is, with a sincere love of charity, or a love according to God, which of its own nature is a mutual duty. Where such a holy love as this reigns, there peace and harmony must dwell; for the characteristics of this love are, according to the Apostle, to condescend to the weaknesses and imperfections of others, to bear their infirmities with mildness and patience, to put up with the inequality and unevenness of their temper and humour, and never designedly to give them any occasion of offence or displeasure; on the contrary, where this holy love of charity is wanting, there disputes, quarrels and dissensions will naturally prevail whenever occasion offers.

Nothing is more destructive of the mutual love that ought to subsist betwixt married persons than nuptial infidelity; nothing more pernicious, nothing ruins the peace of families more, nothing sows the seeds of greater discords, jealousies and altercations; it is one of the greatest of crimes, a most grievous profanation of the Sacrament of Marriage, and a crying injustice committed against the innocent party. *Let marriage be honourable in all, says St. Paul, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge, Heb. xiii. 4. and again, in his Epistle to the Galatians, c. v. the Apostle positively declares, that neither adulterers nor fornicators, nor those who are guilty of the works of the flesh, shall ever inherit the kingdom of God.* The dreadful punishment inflicted on Her and Onan for having violated the laws of nature, and made an improper use of matrimony, as the Book of Genesis informs us, .c. xxxviii. should be a warning to all married people to preserve inviolably the sanctity of the marriage bed, and ought to deter them from ever falling into the like abominations. The love which they are ordered to bear each other must be kept within proper bounds; it is not a sensual love, or a selfish affection, that has nothing in view but the gratification of their passions. No, my brethren, it is a Christian love, that must not be carried beyond the limits which the law of God prescribes; it must be always subordinate and inferior to the love which you owe to the Lord your God, and not like that of Achab King of Israel, who had a greater love for his wife Jezebel than he had for the living God, since to please her he abandoned God, forsook the true religion, and turned idolater, 3 Kings, c. xxi.

Some of the ancient Fathers and Doctors of the Church, speaking of the duties of married persons, and particularly of the first married couple, Adam and Eve, have remarked, that Eve was not formed out of Adam's head, lest she should take from hence an occasion to exalt herself and claim a superiority over him; neither was she made of the slime of the earth, like Adam, nor formed out of his feet, lest he should proudly look down upon her with scorn and contempt, or treat her with harshness and severity as a slave; but she was formed of a rib

taken out of Adam's side, and from the part that was nearest to his heart, to teach him to love, regard and cherish her as his equal, his companion, his helper, and as his very self. Hence St. Paul says, *Men love your wives and be not bitter towards them*, Coloss. iii. 19. and again, *Women be subject to your husbands, as it becometh in the Lord*; and Eph. v. 22. *Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord*; and v. xxiv. *As the Church is subject to Christ, so also let women be subject to their husbands in all things, because the man is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the Church*, v. 23. The authority, then, which God has given husbands over their wives for their common good, is not like that of a master over his slaves, nor even like that of a father over his children, but it resembles the authority which the head has over the members of the body, or rather that of Christ over his mystical body the Church; so that the way he governs the Church, with great meekness, sweetness and love is the best model for husbands to follow in exercising their authority over their wives; as on the other hand, the way that the Church obeys, loves and respects her heavenly spouse, is the best way for wives to conduct themselves towards their husbands. The husband has no right to maltreat, abuse or tyrannize over his wife; nor is the wife to domineer over the husband either by words or actions, but to behave with all due respect, obedience and deference, and to comply with all his lawful commands. If a husband should unfortunately happen to be unreasonable, ill-humoured, or of a morose turbulent temper, a wife is not therefore to give vent to her passions, and break out into bitter invectives or abusive provoking language, but to arm herself with patience, and make use of every gentle and prudent means in her power to bring him gradually to a proper sense of his duty, which she may confidently hope to bring about with the blessing of God, provided she can but command her own temper, and, as the Scripture says, *has a tongue that can cure and mitigate*, Eccles. xxx. 25. Such was the line of conduct that St. Monica and other great servants of God always followed, and they learned by experience that a mild, submissive and endearing behaviour is the most effectual means to reclaim a bad husband and gain his affections.

There is still another duty essential to the married state: when God has been pleased to bless the parties with children, it is their indispensable obligation to give them a Christian and virtuous education, and to use their best endeavours to preserve them in the state of their baptismal sanctity. Nothing, whether in a civil or religious point of view, is more conducive to the happiness of society than a good and proper education of children, as nothing is productive of greater evils than a bad education, it being one of the chief sources of the numberless crimes and disorders, which like a deluge overspread the face of the earth. Wo to those fathers and mothers, whose words

and actions are continual lessons of impiety to their unhappy children, and who, instead of being guardians of their innocence, transmit their own vices to them by their scandalous example. St. Paul tells us that such parents are worse than infidels; and St. John Chrysostom calls them murderers of their children's souls, whose ruin and destruction will be laid at their doors, and whose blood will be demanded at their hands, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, *Ezekiel iii. 18.* when they shall be summoned on the last day to give a strict account of their stewardship. Nay, though parents should happen to be blameless in every other respect, and not conscious to themselves of any personal sins of their own, yet if they fail in this one point, and are careless in discharging their duties in quality of parents and of heads of families, the sins of others which they might and ought to have prevented, will be imputed to them, and the loss of as many souls as perish through their neglect will be laid to their charge. This made the Royal Prophet cry to the Lord, *Ps. xviii. v. 13.* and beseech him *not only to cleanse him from his known personal sins, but also to pardon him his hidden sins, and the sins of others to which he had been any way accessory.*

O Almighty and eternal God, we humbly prostrate ourselves in thy divine presence, and make the same request. Give us grace to be truly sensible of the duties of our respective states, and to fulfil them faithfully to thy honour and glory. Enliven our faith, animate our hope, inflame our charity, and grant that after loving and serving thee here on earth, we may have the happiness to see and enjoy thee hereafter in Heaven. Which I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

JANUARY TWENTY-FIFTH.

On the Conversion of St. Paul.

Gratiâ Dei sum quod sum, et gratia ejus in me vacua non fuit.

I Cor. c. xv. v. 20.

By the Grace of God I am what I am, and his Grace has not been in vain.

I Cor. c. xv. v. 20.

ON this day the Church celebrates a particular festival, in memory of, and in thanksgiving for the wonderful Conversion of the great St. Paul; from which the world has derived so many signal advantages, and which will serve as a perfect

model to converts and penitents of all succeeding ages. In him we plainly see that man, however weak and insufficient of himself, is capable of the most noble exploits, and equal to the greatest difficulties with the assistance of God's grace. It is to this heavenly source that our Saint gratefully attributes all his perfections, and the merit of all the eminent virtues which adorned his life, and which justly rendered him the admiration of the universe: *By the grace of God, says he, I am what I am, and his grace has not been in me in vain.* Behold, in a few words, what wonders the grace of God wrought in favour of St. Paul, and what St. Paul did in favour and in defence of God's grace. He was a conquest and victim of grace on the one hand, and a Champion and Doctor of grace on the other. The grace of God subdued his heart, and gained a complete victory over his proud spirit. Fortified by the same grace he subdued the powers of darkness, and gained a complete victory over the enemies of God's grace; so that we may call him, without the least exaggeration, a most stupendous prodigy of divine grace, whether we consider the wonderful change that the grace of God wrought in him, the great liberality and profusion with which it was bestowed on him, or the exact fidelity whereby he constantly corresponded with it from the time of his conversion to the latest period of his life: In fine, the grace of God triumphing over St. Paul, and rendering him most conspicuous for the lustre of his virtues, and the multiplicity of his apostolic labours, and St. Paul triumphing with the grace of God over the pride of the world and the rulers of darkness. This is the whole plan and subject of the following discourse. O wonderful grace of my God! It is thy panegyric I undertake when I undertake that of St. Paul. Enable me, therefore, to display thy virtue and efficacy this day, to the honor and glory of the Giver of all good gifts and graces, and to the edification of this Christian assembly. Obtain for us this favor, O blessed Mother of our Divine Redeemer, through thy intercession, which we humbly request, greeting thee with the Angel, *Ave Maria, &c.*

Never did the mercy of the Lord display itself with more magnificence in favor of any individual, nor did the victorious grace of Jesus Christ ever shine with greater lustre and splendor in the conversion of any particular person, as St. Bernard remarks, than it did in the miraculous conversion of Saul, once a sworn enemy of Christianity. To be convinced hereof we need but consider the obstacles that were to be removed, the difficulties that were to be surmounted, and the victories that were to be gained before his conversion could be effected, and then we shall be obliged to acknowledge with the Royal Prophet, *that such a change was nothing less than the work of the right hand of the Most High; that it has been wrought by the Lord himself, and that it is wonderful in our eyes.* Represent to yourselves, therefore, a resolute, positive, self-

sufficient and enterprising man, over-ruled by his own private judgment, big with the opinion he has of his own wit and knowledge, a rigid observer of the ceremonies of the Jewish law, wedded to the doctrine of the Pharisees, strongly attached to the traditions of his ancestors, blinded by prejudice of education, and so fond of maintaining the errors which he imbibed in his early days, that, without any further examination, he rashly and inconsiderately condemns and opposes whatever does not agree with his weak reason, or suit with his own way of thinking. Represent to yourselves, I say, such a man, who desirous to outshine all his equals, and to distinguish himself by some extraordinary exploits, abandons himself to the ardour of his natural dispositions, to the heat of his passions, to the vivacity of his temper, and to the impetuosity of an indiscreet zeal; who deceives himself for fear of being deceived; who, through a motive of religion, attacks religion itself, and under the pretext of piety endeavours to extirpate all those who make a profession of it. Such a person was Saul, before he was converted into Paul!

The death of St. Stephen, the first martyr of the new Law, to which he had been accessory, by guarding the garments of those who stoned him, that by this means he might have the pleasure of stoning him by the hands of all his cruel executioners, as St. Augustine remarks; the death, I say, of this Christian hero and illustrious champion of Jesus Christ, was not sufficient to appease the wrath of Saul, or satiate the thirst he had after Christian blood, but he resolved to make open war against all the disciples, and if possible, extirpate the very name of Christianity. Jerusalem, nay, all Palestine or the Holy Land, shortly before that time bedewed with the blood of the innocent Lamb of God, appeared to him to be too small a theatre for executing his furious designs and cruel projects; for, not content with having purpled the streets of Jerusalem with Christian blood, not satisfied with having searched the houses of that city, and dragged the faithful with open violence into prisons, and from thence before the tribunals of judges, he is still pushed on by a greater madness, and is determined to persecute the followers and adherents of Christ even into foreign countries, that were not under the jurisdiction of the Jews. He had not patience to wait until he was employed, but of his own accord he goes to the High Priest, and demands sanguinary letters to the synagogue of Damascus which was fifty leagues from Jerusalem; he obtains a commission, whereby he is authorized and empowered to seize, without any distinction of sex or age, all the Christians he could find, and to bring them bound with chains, and laden with irons, to Jerusalem, in order to be there imprisoned, condemned, and executed without mercy or compassion. Alas! to what extremes are the enemies of the Church often hurried by a blind zeal for a false religion? Saul was then entering

into the thirty-third year and the fervour of his age, which meeting with his blind zeal for the Jewish religion, made him undertake with alacrity a journey to the city of Damascus, armed with no less fury than King Antiochus formerly was when he marched in full haste towards Jerusalem, with a full intent to lay that city in ashes, to massacre all its inhabitants, and bury them under its ruins; for as St. Luke tells us, *Saul breathed nothing but threats and slaughter*, but fire and desolation against the disciples of the Lord. You may judge what a difficult task it was to convert a man of these dispositions. Who would have imagined, then, that this very person was to be one day the most strenuous defender of the Christian religion? Who would have believed that a wolf, who ravaged the Lord's sheepfold so furiously, was to become, in a short time after, one of the best of Pastors, one of the Pillars of the Church, one of the Princes of the apostolic College? And yet, glory, honour and praise be to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, this was the case; for the very time he was exercising the aforesaid barbarous cruelties, was the happy time which Heaven had destined for his conversion. When he was drawing near the city of Damascus with weapons in his hand, rage in his heart, and fury in his eyes, the Father of Mercies was pleased to look down propitiously upon him, and draw him out of the abyss of iniquity after a singular manner, that the triumph of his grace might be thereby rendered the more illustrious.

To humble the pride of Pharaoh God was pleased to send Moses; he destined the Prophet Jonas for the conversion of the Nipivites, Nathan for the conversion of King David, and the twelve Apostles for the conversion of the whole world; but when Saul was to be converted and gained over to the true faith, neither Prophets, nor Apostles, nor Angels were employed; a work attended with such difficulty was reserved for Jesus Christ himself in person, who was pleased to become Saul's Preacher and Apostle, and to employ both his power and mercy to subdue his stubborn and rebellious heart, and gain a complete victory over his proud spirit; hence he prostrated him, in order to raise him to the dignity of an Apostle; he blinded him in order to enlighten him; he humbled him in order to exalt him, and make him a Doctor of the Church; for a great light from Heaven, brighter than the sun, having on a sudden surrounded Saul as he was on the road to Damascus, he was thrown from his horse, cast on the ground, and struck blind; at the same time a voice, like a terrible clap of thunder, was heard in the air, saying to him, *Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me? I am Jesus, whom thou dost persecute: It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.* No sooner did he hear this voice from Heaven, but he was struck with terror and amazement, and cried out immediately, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* No sooner was he deprived of the sight.

of his corporal eyes, but the eyes of his soul were opened, and the clouds of ignorance that darkened his understanding were dispelled. No sooner was he called by the Father of Mercies, but he obeys his orders and goes into the city of Damascus, where he is baptized by Ananias, recovers his sight, and is filled with the holy Ghost. He is now no longer the same person he was; he is converted in an instant; Saul is changed into Paul; the old man, and all other earthly sentiments, are crucified in his heart; he tramples on all the suggestions of flesh and blood; he renounces Satan with all his works; *he counts all things in the world as dirt, to gain Jesus Christ*; he is inspired with a firm resolution to devote himself entirely to God, and aspire to the very summit of Christian perfection; he is ready to undertake every thing, to execute every thing, to suffer every thing in order to repair the past, and promote the honour and glory of his Divine Master. He combats against himself, he fights against his passions, he encounters the depraved inclinations of nature, he subdues his own will, and submits it to the will of God, *he chastises his body, and brings it under subjection to the spirit* by severe fastings, watchings, and other great mortifications. In a word, he takes up his cross and follows Jesus Christ, aiming at nothing more than to become a living picture and image of that Divine Original. Far from persecuting the Church, he is now resolved to establish it in every part of the known world; far from making war against the Christians, he is now determined to defend them, to instruct them, to comfort them, and to relieve them; from a ravenous wolf he is transformed into a meek lamb; from an implacable enemy and cruel persecutor he is changed into a faithful disciple of Christ, and a most zealous Pastor of his flock; from a vessel of wrath he becomes a vessel of election, a mirror of sanctity, and a darling of Heaven. Scarce was he converted to the true faith when he began in public to *preach Jesus Christ crucified*, to the great confusion of the Jews, but to the inexpressible joy and consolation of the faithful, who magnified the Lord for having raised so able a champion to support their cause. No distance of nations could confine the ardour of his indefatigable zeal; he flew like lightning from city to city, from province to province, from country to country, from one kingdom to another, sowing the seed of his heavenly doctrine, and beating down the pride of Casars by the humility of the cross; wherever he goes, he preaches both by his word and example the gospel of austerity and self denial; and O, miracle of God's grace! the arrogance of philosophers is humbled, the eloquence of orators is confounded, his doctrine is received by a people until then drowned in sensuality, and is adopted by nations where idolatry reigned and where superstition had placed her throne. He carries the *sweet name of Jesus before the Gentiles* with great simplicity, and no sooner announces the mysteries

of salvation to them, but he persuades them to adore a crucified God instead of a thundering Jupiter, a Mars and a Venus. At his arrival the enemies of Jesus Christ are struck blind, the devils quit the bodies of those they possessed, the oracles are silenced, the altars of the false gods are demolished, their sacrifices are abolished, their idols are destroyed, the empire of Satan is overthrown, the sick are healed, the dead are raised to life, the deaf, the dumb and the blind are restored to their perfect senses; the Jews acknowledge their obstinacy, the Gentiles renounce their superstition, the learned are convinced of their errors, the unlearned are instructed in the science of salvation, the magicians burn their books, the temples of the devils are pulled down, Christian churches are founded, numberless sinners are rescued from the jaws of hell, multitudes cry out for baptism, the kingdom of Jesus Christ is enlarged, the true religion is established upon the ruins of paganism and the destruction of the Jewish synagogue. Such were the signal advantages that this great Apostle reaped from his labours; such were the worthy fruits of his repentance; such were the trophies he gained wherever he travelled, aided only by the grace of God, and armed by the two-edged sword of his divine word. So true it is, *that the grace of God was not in vain in him*, but wrought the most stupendous prodigies in him and by him, in order to enable him to subdue the united legions of hell, with the combined powers of the earth, and subject the world to the sweet yoke of the Evangelical law.

Behold here, my brethren, a finished model of a true and sincere conversion, and at the same time a most illustrious example, that is sufficient to afford consolation even to the greatest sinners on earth, and to inspire them with hope and confidence in the divine mercy, as it shews plainly that the Lord, as it were, delights in making the riches of his mercy shine in the conversion of great sinners, according to the words of the Apostle, *Where sin has abounded, there has grace superabounded*. The wonderful change that the grace of God wrought in St. Paul, is a convincing proof that there is no wound incurable to the hand of an omnipotent Physician, as St. Augustin speaks, and therefore we should never despair, let our case be ever so desperate, since we are yet capable of eternal life, and may still become vessels of election, if like St. Paul we be sincerely converted to the Lord our God, and practise the virtues that are within the sphere of our duty; but if we harden our hearts, if we resist the Holy Ghost, if we reject the graces that are offered to us by the Father of Mercies, if we put off our conversion from day to day, if we shut our ears against the voice of God, if we obstinately refuse to hear and obey him when he knocks at the door of our heart, and mercifully calls us to repentance by the interior motions of his grace, alas! we run the risk of being eternally excluded

from the kingdom of Heaven; and this perhaps would have been the very case of Saul the persecutor, if he had not seized on the favourable opportunity that was offered to him on the road to Damascus. Instead of being one of the greatest saints in Heaven, he would now, perhaps, be the fuel of eternal flames if he had neglected the precious moments of his visitation. But he obeyed at the first call and voice of our Saviour, to denote his entire submission; he cried out immediately, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* making an entire sacrifice and oblation of himself to execute the divine will in every thing, the corporal blindness with which he was struck exciting him to bewail the spiritual blindness in which he had lived. He was led by the hand into Damascus, where he sought a spiritual guide, a skilful director, an holy bishop, by name *Ananias*, who received him into the pale of the Church, and pointed out to him the way of salvation; for though he was called to the ministry by God himself, yet he could not exercise the functions of an Apostle till he was received by the Church, till he had his credentials signed, till *Ananias imposed hands on him*. Jesus Christ would not finish his instructions by himself, as St. Augustin observes, but sent him to be approved, guided and directed by the Ministers whom he appointed in the Church for that purpose, and whom he commands to hear in his name. So true it is, that a lawful mission is required to preach the Word of God, *for how shall they preach unless they be sent*, says St. Paul, Rom. x. 15. He foretold, Acts, c. xx. that in after-times several persons would rise up speaking perverse things, in order to draw the faithful after them; wherefore he desires us to watch and persevere in the ancient faith, and though an Angel from Heaven should preach another Gospel, to look upon him as anathema, Galat. c. i. v. 8. This shews what little credit we are to give to those self-created and self-opinionated teachers of our days, who, without any ordination, without any mission, usurp a power that does not belong to them, and come of their own accord, in opposition to the Pastors of the Church of Christ, to preach up new-fangled doctrines and to point out a new road to Heaven, as if they had more sense than the rest of mankind, and understood the Scriptures better than all their predecessors in all the foregoing ages. St. Paul, after his conversion, was far from giving into a presumption and self-confidence of this kind, it being the source of error and illusion; he was so far from making his own private judgment the rule and standard of his faith, as our modern free-thinkers do, that he submitted himself to the guidance of the Pastors and Prelates of the Church; he captivated his understanding in obedience to divine faith, and was willing to be instructed in the way of salvation by the Ministers of Jesus Christ, and to learn his will from their mouth. O, my brethren, how different is this from the conduct of several unhappy sinners of these days, who, deaf to the

salutary instructions and advice of their Pastors and spiritual Guides, continue whole years together on the road of Damascus, on the broad road of eternal perdition, running headlong to their own destruction? The Lord, who desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live, ceases not to invite them to repentance by his secret inspirations; he is ready to embrace them with open arms, provided they return in the sincerity of their hearts; he offers them the kiss of peace; he speaks to them by the mouth of his Preachers and Teachers, he cries out to them, *I am Jesus whom you persecute*, and crucify over again by every mortal sin you commit; but they are unfortunately so hardened and stiff-necked, that neither the loud thunder of God's menaces, nor the clamours and stings of a guilty conscience, nor the advice of the Clergy, nor the most feeling discourses that are delivered from the chair of truth are able to awaken them from the profound lethargy of their sins. Alas, unhappy mortals! what excuse shall they plead, or what account shall they give of themselves on the day of judgment, when the Son of God shall reproach them with the insensibility of their hearts? If Saul could not hear those few words from his mouth without falling to the ground, *I am Jesus whom thou dost persecute*, how shall they be able to withstand the same thundering voice, and to hear the same bitter reproaches on the last day? How shall they be able to appear before their angry Judge, and hear him pronounce this terrible sentence of their eternal reprobation, *Depart from me ye accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*.

I heartily wish, my dear brethren, that the Lord may preserve every one in this congregation from the misfortune of falling under this terrible sentence, and therefore I conjure you all, in the name of the living God, to copy after the noble pattern I have hitherto laid before you. The same grace that sanctified the great Apostle is able to sanctify you, if you co-operate faithfully with it, and be sincerely converted to the Lord your God; and the same recompence is also reserved for you by the just Judge, provided you labour seriously for it according to your respective stations of life, edifying your neighbour by your good example, and endeavouring by your wholesome advice to convert and reclaim such as you know to be unhappily straying away from the path of salvation.

O sweetest Jesus! grant the grace of a true conversion to all sinners; have compassion on all those who through error and infidelity are out of the pale of thy Church. Open their eyes, and remove, by thy heavenly light, their obstinacy and prejudice, which prevent them from embracing thy revealed truths. Remember, O merciful Redeemer, that thou didst come down from Heaven to seek one strayed sheep on the road to Damascus. By the same charity we beseech thee, to bring back to thy flock all those who are straying from thee, the

good Shepherd of our souls. Lead them into the ways of truth and virtue, that being united to thee by faith and charity, we may *all become one fold under one Shepherd*, until we meet together in the charming mansions of the heavenly Jerusalem. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

On the Duties of Masters and Servants.

Accessit ad eum Centurio, rogans eum, et dicens, Domine puer meus jacet in domo paralyticus, et male torquetur.—*S. Mat. c. viii. v. 6.*

There came to him a Centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is much tormented.—St. Mat. c. viii. v. 6.

TWO great miracles are related in the Gospel of this day: first the instantaneous cure of a man covered all over with a leprosy, who no sooner acknowledged the divine power of our Blessed Saviour, but he immediately stretched forth his merciful hand, and with a single touch of it healed him in a moment. The second is the wonderful cure of the servant of a Centurion or Roman Captain, who came to our Divine Redeemer saying, *Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy.* He presented his petition with such humility, faith and confidence, that Jesus Christ said to those who followed him, *I have not found so great faith in Israel.* The Centurion's tenderness and compassion for his poor servant made him overlook every trouble that was necessary to be taken for the purpose of having him speedily restored to his perfect health; his charity induced him to go himself in person to Jesus, in hope; that he would vouchsafe to look upon him with an eye of pity, and effect his recovery; but thinking himself unworthy of the honour to receive the Son of God under the roof of his house, and believing that his divine power was able to operate at a distance, and that one single word from him would be no less efficacious than his actual presence, he cried out, *O Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, say but the word and my boy shall be healed;* whereupon our merciful Redeemer was moved to grant his request, and replied with his usual meekness, *Go, and as thou hast believed, be it done to thee,* and, as the Gospel tells us, *the servant was healed at the same time.* Behold here, my brethren, an excellent lesson for us all to be humble always in our own eyes, since nothing moves

God more effectually to bestow his blessings, and grant his gracious favours to us than a profound humility. *He stoops, says St. Augustine, to the humble, and withdraws himself from the proud.* The charitable conduct of the Centurion towards his servant is also an instructive lesson to all masters and mistresses with regard to their servants, and affords me a favourable opportunity to expatiate on the respective duties and obligations both of the one and the other, in the following discourse. The duties of masters and mistresses to their servants shall be the subject of the first point; the duties of servants to their masters and mistresses shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, whom the Angel saluted *full of grace.* Ave Maria.

The providence of God reacheth strongly from end to end, and sweetly disposeth all things, as the Scripture expresses it : It exalts some persons to a higher station in life, and places others in a lower and more humble degree, for the mutual benefit and greater advantage of both, that by a faithful compliance with the different duties and functions of their respective states they may be useful to each other, and may all attain to the happy end for which they have been created. Civil society, and the union of its members, could not subsist if there was a perfect equality in the states and conditions of life, or if all men were upon the same footing, and independent of each other; whereas in consequence of the wise arrangement of Providence, and the establishment of different states and conditions in the world, they are closely linked together by ties of subordination and mutual dependence which engages them to serve and assist one another as members of the same body and children of the same great family, whereof God is the common Father and the Sovereign Lord and Master. All authority that earthly masters and mistresses have over their servants, is derived from God; they are but upper servants and stewards themselves, and shall be called one day to a strict account of their stewardship if they abuse their authority, or do not exercise it for the good end for which it is given them. Hence St. Paul, speaking of the duties of masters and mistresses to their servants, says to them, Ephes. c. vi. v. 9. *Both you and they have a Master in Heaven, and there is no respect of persons with him;* and again, Coloss. c. 4. v. 1. *Masters do to your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that you also have a Master in Heaven.*

The justice that masters and mistresses owe their servants, consists first, in exactly paying them their wages according to agreement. God has strictly enjoined this duty, and to be wanting herein is a most sinful oppression and enormous crime, that is said to cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance, St James, c. v. v. 4. Secondly, they are bound to see that their servants' provision and diet be sufficient and wholesome; for as their whole livelihood depends on their labour, and their labour on

their health, it is cruelty not to provide for them such food as may be consistent with health. If sickness disables them for a time, justice and charity dictate that proper care ought to be taken for their recovery. The solicitude of the good Centurion, who had recourse to Christ with such fervour and concern for his sick servant, is a model for all heads of families, and shews them that they are not to abandon their servants in the hour of distress, but to afford them every necessary assistance, both spiritual and temporal, and to consider them as a part of their family, as their own brethren, as their own selves, according to these words of the Scripture, *If thou hast a faithful servant, let him be to thee as thy own soul, treat him as a brother*, Eccles. c. xxxiii. v. 31. And really a good and faithful servant, who fears God, is a valuable treasure, and often brings a blessing to the family where he lives. We have a remarkable instance hereof in Genesis, c. xxxix. v. 5. wherein we read, that when Joseph was servant to Pharaoh's officer in Egypt, the Lord blessed the house of the Egyptian for Joseph's sake, and multiplied all his substance both at home and in the fields. What shall we then say of those masters and mistresses who look down upon their servants with scorn and contempt, as creatures made merely for drudgery, and treat them with as much cruelty as Pharaoh formerly treated the children of Israel, overloading them with insupportable burdens, and working them like slaves and beasts? People of this description should remember, that the master and the servant, the lady and her maid, are formed out of the same piece of clay, and therefore cannot pretend to any natural superiority over one another. All the advantage comes from money or title, and perhaps from fraud and circumvention, in which case an innocent slave is more noble and more valuable in the judgment of God than a wicked monarch. He that has received fewer talents of the goods of this life, will have a less account to give on the last day than he to whom much was given. He may of course expect that the divine justice will deal with him more mildly, and punish him less severely, than those who are exalted to a higher station of life, according to these words of the Scripture, *To him that is little mercy is granted, but the mighty shall be mightily tormented*, Wisd. c. vi. v. 6. Moreover, the Gospel teaches us that we are all brethren in Jesus Christ; he gave as many drops of his precious blood for poor Lazarus, as he did for the rich man who was clothed in purple and silk, and feasted sumptuously every day; and he purchased as good a title to Heaven for the lowest servant on earth as for the most exalted lord. Servants therefore are not to be despised, maltreated, or oppressed with over-hard labour on account of their poor humble situation, but to be used with kindness and brotherly love, especially when they conduct themselves with propriety. At the approach of old age, when they are past their labour, and after spending their blood and exhausting

their sweat, their strength and spirits in servitude, they are not to be turned out of doors and unmercifully exposed to want and misery in the streets, because they are incapable of earning their bread. This would be to imitate the barbarity of those savages in India, who are said to expose old, decrepit and disabled people to the danger of immediate death, by falling victims to the ferocity of lions and tigers. Masters and mistresses should rather copy after the charitable Samaritan and the Centurion in this day's Gospel, by succouring their faithful servants in time of infirmity and old age, and making them a grateful recompence for their past services when they stand most in need of help. Hence the Scripture says, *Hurt not the servant that worketh faithfully, nor the hired man that giveth thee his life; defraud him not of liberty, nor leave him needy and distressed*, Eccles. c. vii. v. 23.

Besides the attention that masters and mistresses are bound to pay to their servants bodily health and temporal welfare, it is incumbent on them to be mindful of the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of their souls. *If any one*, says St. Paul, *has not care of those that belong to him, and particularly his domestics, he has lost his faith and is worse than an infidel*, 1 Tim. v. Nay, it is not only the duty, but likewise the interest of masters and mistresses, to see that their servants lead a Christian life; the better Christians they are, the better servants they will also be. They should be allowed a convenient time for attending their devotions, frequenting the holy Sacraments, hearing the Word of God, and complying with the general duties of Christianity, the practice of which masters and mistresses are obliged to enforce, if requisite, by making use of the authority which God has given them. It is highly commendable, if circumstances will allow it, to assemble their whole family every night for the purpose of paying a common homage of prayer to God, especially as our Blessed Saviour assures us in the Gospel, that where two or three are assembled together in his name, he is in the midst of them. Servants should not be compelled to unnecessary labour on the Lord's Day, but be left at liberty to devote the better part of it to the spiritual exercises of piety and devotion; for God has expressly ordered in the Third Commandment, that neither man nor maid servant should be employed in doing any servile work on the Sabbath Day, because they are all the week engaged in a continual slavery; and if they be hindered from sanctifying the day of rest which God has given them, and ordered to be kept holy in a particular manner, they will have but little opportunity to serve their Master in Heaven, and take proper care of their souls.

Admonition is another duty of masters and mistresses; they not only have the charge, but also the command of their domestics, under God, and therefore they are accountable for all the sinful disorders which are the effect of their connivance

or neglect. Charitable means and repeated advice are to be tried first, then reproof and threats; for to be silent where faults deserve reproof or correction, is a vicious mildness; and to be always finding fault about trifles, and scolding for every little mistake, is another extreme to be equally avoided. Masters and mistresses are to make some allowance for the weakness of human nature, and instead of venting their passions in haughty, imperious, abusive and scurrilous language, or in horrid oaths or imprecations, they should treat their servants with gentleness and humanity, as their fellow Christians, and give their orders and directions in an easy, cool manner. A treatment of this kind is apter to gain the affections, and to attach the hearts of servants to the welfare of their masters and mistresses; for which reason the Scripture says, *Be not as a lion in thy house, terrifying those of thy household, and oppressing them that are under thee*, Eccles. c. iv. v. 35. When anger is necessary, it ought to be managed with charity, moderation and discretion. If after using the like endeavours for the amendments of faults and neglects, servants continue obstinate, incorrigible, subject to drunkenness, cursing, swearing, or any kind of obscene and scandalous words and actions, they are to be discharged for the good of the family, when after three or four admonitions and reproofs they do not mend. This is the doctrine which St. Charles Borromæus, in his Pastoral Instructions, where he says, "The heads of families, who do not oblige their domestics to learn the necessary duties of Christianity, or who do not mind whether they observe the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, or who do not reprove them when they sin, or do not dismiss them when they are incorrigible, and continue to give scandal to their children, are by no means to be absolved unless they discharge their duty, and promise to be more vigilant in removing what may be an infection to their whole family."

Good example is another duty of masters and mistresses, and the surest way to keep order and regularity in a family. The want of this is the ruin of many servants, who considering those that are over them as their head, naturally receive impressions from whatever they see or hear them do or say, and are thereby encouraged to follow, without scruple, the tracks of those who should guide them; nay, servants of evil inclinations are often glad to find shelter under the bad example of their masters and mistresses.

As to the duties of servants, they may be briefly reduced to these three heads: Respect, Obedience, and Fidelity. First, they are obliged both in words and actions, to honour and respect their masters and mistresses, who, by God's appointment, have authority over them. Far from joining in any discourses or complaints, either with their companions or strangers; far from revealing their private faults, or divulging their secrets,

which may lessen their reputation, they are bound to espouse their interest in things that are lawful, and to defend their character as far as truth and justice will allow, whenever calumny or detraction attempts to blacken it. When they are reprov'd, they are to behave with submission and patience, governing their tongues, and refraining from surly looks and from answers unbecoming their condition, according to the advice given by St. Paul, of *not answering again*, or contending for the last word. If the reproof be for some real fault, then, as it is justly deserved, it ought to be considered as an act of justice, and should be borne in silence without murmuring, or shewing ill humour. When they give no occasion, and are notwithstanding chid and reprov'd, they are still to humble themselves, in hopes of partaking hereafter of the reward promised to those who suffer for justice sake, 1 Pet. c. ii. v. 18, 19. They may, indeed, declare the truth, and shew their innocence with calmness and in a few respectful words, when they are allowed to speak in their own defence; yet, if they are not believed, but blamed, as faulty, silence is a better expedient than an unreasonable ill-timed defence. Lies of excuse, though very common on similar occasions, are not to be resorted to for the purpose of avoiding anger, because this is defending themselves with the weapons of Satan, and offending God to escape the anger of men. It is much more adviseable to own their fault candidly whenever they are guilty, to promise amendment, and to be more careful in not giving any further occasion for anger.

The next duty of servants, is obedience in all lawful commands. *Servants*, says St. Paul, Ephes. c. vi. v. 4. *Obey your carnal masters with fear and trembling; do what you are ordered with a good will, that is, willingly and cheerfully; and again, Coloss. c. iii. v. 22. Servants be obedient in all things, not eye-servers, as it were pleasing men, but with simplicity of heart, fearing God. Whatever ye do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that from the Lord ye shall receive the reward of inheritance.* Hence it is evident, that servants are to consider God commanding them in the persons of their masters and mistresses, and are to obey their commands as if it was God himself they obeyed, or as if it was God that enjoined this work or that labour through the mouth of their master or mistress. A ready compliance, in contradiction to all the interior motions of their own will, and a prompt obedience, without unnecessary delays or putting off to another time the business that is better done at present, is undoubtedly a very meritorious self-denial and a most acceptable Christian virtue, that cannot fail entitling servants to a great recompence in Heaven, provided they refer it to God with an intention of pleasing him, and are obedient *not* through a servile or mercenary motive, *as to men only*, says the Apostle, *but as to God*, by whose power men command, and for whose sake they are to

be obeyed, in all their lawful commands only; for the obedience due by servants, does not oblige them to concur in any thing that is sinful, or to comply with any orders which are contrary to the Law of God. In such a case, *God is to be obeyed before men*; for which reason the servants of Absalom, spoken of 2 Kings, c. xiii. are justly condemned for having obeyed the wicked orders of their master, who had commanded them to murder Ammon.

Fidelity is the third duty of servants, according to these words of St. Paul, Tit. c. ii. v. 9. *Exhort servants to be subject to their masters, in all things pleasing, not contradicting, not defrauding them, but in all things shewing good fidelity.* This fidelity obliges them to employ their time well, through a motive of justice and for conscience sake, and of course to be careful in the performance of whatever business they undertake, not only when they have the master's or the mistress's eye to overlook them, but also when they are not seen, and have no other witness but God. They are bound to manage whatever is entrusted to them, and is under their charge, as if it were their own, and not let their master or mistress suffer any prejudice or loss through their connivance, neglect or prodigality. If money be entrusted to them, they must be faithful in disposing of it to the best advantage, and in giving a fair account of what is expended, without overcharging or keeping any part of it to themselves. All that they save, all the profit they make in buying or selling at a better rate than others, belongs to their master and mistress, who employs them for that purpose; and if they make bad bargains for them, on account of some presents offered to them by those with whom they deal, they are guilty of a breach of fidelity, and of a violation of justice. To waste and embezzle their master's substance, to take up articles clandestinely on his score, to convert what belongs to him to their own or any other person's use, without his knowledge and leave; to entertain their acquaintance and companions at his cost; to retain the money they find in the sweepings of the house; to receive considerable presents from children, who have no right to alienate the property of their parents, without permission; and to have recourse to private compensation, upon the specious pretext that their wages are not proportioned to their hard labour, are likewise unjust practices and manifest breaches of fidelity contrary to the Law of God, and condemned by the Church.

The holy Scripture holds out to all servants a very edifying example of fidelity, in the person of the virtuous Joseph, who was entrusted by his master with the management of all his affairs, and another in the patient and laborious Jacob, who served his uncle Laban so faithfully that he never embezzled any part of his substance, never neglected his business, never alienated his property, nor suffered his goods to be damaged

for want of due care, Gen. c. xxx. and xxxi. But no example can be more edifying, more instructive, or more powerful to encourage and animate all Christian servants to a faithful and cheerful compliance with the duties of their state, than the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, *who being in the form of God, as the Apostle speaks, Phil. c. ii. v. 6, did not disdain to humble himself, taking the form of a servant.* Though he was the Son of the living God, and the King of Heaven and earth, yet he vouchsafed to go before all Christian servants by his example, says St. Augustine, in his Exposition of the cxxivth Psalm, having washed his disciples' feet with the most profound humility, and declared in the xxth ch. of St. Matthew, v. 28, *that he came not to be served, but to serve*; the very consideration hereof is sufficient to hinder servants from murmuring, fretting, and repining at the low situation in which Providence has been pleased to place them. Instead of complaining, and thinking themselves wretched and unhappy, because they are obliged to earn their bread with the sweat of their brow and the labour of their hands, they ought rather to rejoice and console themselves with the pleasing reflexion, that they have it in their power to become more perfect followers of Jesus Christ, and to imitate him the better, as their state bears a strong resemblance to him humble state which he was pleased to choose for himself here on earth. It preserves them from a variety of tribulations, anxieties and dangers, to which other states are generally exposed. It is the state designed and appointed for them by the will of God, who knows what is most proper for them, and most conducive to their eternal salvation. It puts them under the happy necessity of practising the truly Christian virtues of humility, obedience and penance, and affords them the fairest opportunity of laying up spiritual treasures for their souls, and gaining a never-fading crown of glory in Heaven, whilst they are working every day for the subsistence of their bodies, and earning an honest livelihood for themselves on earth. O, how happy, then, would servants be, if they took proper care to discharge faithfully, and with due submission to the divine will, all the obligations to which their condition engages them? By this means they would bid fair to go before their masters and mistresses in the next life, and become more acceptable to their common Lord and Master than those who, in this world, seem to have much the advantage of them. The surest way for them to find comfort and satisfaction, where all other earthly comforts are wanting, is to carry their cross willingly after Jesus Christ, and to preserve always the testimony of a good conscience, which, according to the Scripture, *is a continual feast.* No worldly advantage or salary should induce them to accept of, or to remain in any place, where they see nothing but scandalous example, are denied the free exercise of their religion, or are exposed to the immediate danger of

being ruined and drawn into vice. They are not to be deterred by human respect or servile fear, from showing their absolute dislike and utter aversion to whatever is disorderly and criminal. God is to be feared more than man, for which reason they are to be ready to lose their corporal life in defence of virtue, rather than sacrifice their souls to Satan by consenting to one single mortal sin. Let them, above all things, love and serve the Lord their God, and lead a Christian life, by keeping all his commandments and observing the precepts of his Church. Since they have not the command of their own time, whilst their hands are employed at their daily labour, let them raise their hearts and thoughts frequently to Heaven, and breathe forth some short ejaculatory prayer; let them bear the hardships they have to endure with patience and resignation, and offer them up in the spirit of penance, and in union with the toils and laborious life of Jesus Christ on earth. By these means all their sufferings will be sanctified and improved into occasions of virtue; and what makes their life here below so painful and so uneasy will become lighter, and be rendered a most acceptable sacrifice in the sight of Heaven. O Divine Jesus, we prostrate ourselves at the sacred feet of thy mercy, like the poor leper mentioned in the Gospel, and most humbly beseech thee to pardon our past errors and neglects. We acknowledge that our souls are covered with the leprosy of sin, but we know that if thou wilt thou canst heal us. We own, with the Centurion, that we are unworthy of thy gracious favours, and do not deserve to be ranked in the number of thy children, or to be called thy servants; but we also know that thy mercies are above all thy works. Vouchsafe then, O blessed Redeemer, to stretch forth thy hand, and touch our souls with the healing balsam of thy grace, that like unto the leper we may be cleansed and purified from all the foul stains of sin, and found fit on the last day to be admitted into the happy mansions of the heavenly Jerusalem. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

On the necessity of subduing our Passions, and practising Self-denial.

Imperavit ventis et mari, et facta est tranquillitas magna.

Matt. c. viii. v. 26.

Jesus commanded the winds and the sea, and there ensued a great calm.

Matt. c. viii. v. 26.

WE read in the Gospel of this day, that our Blessed Saviour having embarked along with his disciples on board a small

ship, in order to cross over the sea of Gallilee, a violent storm arose, and the sea began to rage so furiously that the ship wherein they sailed, was covered with waves, and seemed to be in imminent danger of sinking. The Evangelist tells us, that our Saviour was in the mean time asleep at the stern. Wherefore the disciples, intimidated at their situation, and apprehending that they would shortly be swallowed up in the deep, awakened him and cried out for relief, saying, *O Lord save us, for we are perishing.* The Saviour of the world, moved by their cries, and attentive to their petition, rose up in an instant, and after rebuking them for their little faith, he commanded the winds to be silent, and the sea to be still, and immediately the storm abated, and there ensued a perfect calm.

The ship wherein Christ and his disciples sailed, was an emblem of the Holy Catholic Church, which, by the permission of Heaven, has been oftentimes tossed to and fro by the stormy winds of violent persecutions, and so furiously beaten by the merciless waves of several formidable heresies and schisms, that for a while she appeared to be, as it were, in a manner abandoned by Divine Providence, and in manifest danger of being wrecked and dashed to pieces. But glory be to God, the Church of Christ never was, and never will be abandoned by Heaven. She has already withstood every shock, and weathered out every storm that the powers of hell have raised against her these seventeen hundred years past, and undoubtedly she will continue to the end of time, to rise triumphantly like Noah's ark, above the raging billows of persecution, and the swelling waves of pernicious errors, since Christ himself has promised to abide constantly with her unto the consummation of ages, and since the Holy Ghost presides continually at the helm, in order to steer and guide her in all truth unto the very end of the world.

The members indeed of the church militant must expect to meet with various adversities and tribulations, conflicts and storms, whilst they are sailing through the boisterous ocean of this mortal life. It is in vain for them to hope to be entirely exempted from such trials, until they have the happiness to arrive in the haven of a blessed eternity. In the interim Christ our Lord appears sometimes, as it were, to sleep and to neglect them, in order to try their fidelity, to exercise their patience, to encrease their merit, to make them more sensible of their manifold necessities, and more fervent in imploring the succour of his divine grace. However he never fails, in his own good time, to bring seasonable aid and relief to those who place their trust and confidence in him, and have recourse to his mercy in the hour of distress. This should animate us to encounter every difficulty that occurs in the service of God, with courage and resolution, and like the disciples in the gospel of this day, to call devoutly on Jesus, our Blessed Redeemer, to be our safeguard and protector amidst the various dangers

which surround us on every side, particularly those most dangerous storms and frequent conflicts that arise from the violence of our passions, and from the depravity of the human heart; for as the prophet Isaias says, the heart of man is like unto a tempestuous sea, disturbed and agitated by so many disorderly passions, that the ship of his soul is continually exposed to the danger of splitting on the rocks of eternal perdition, if he does not take care, with the assistance of God's grace, to regulate the motions of his heart, to check the violence of his passions, and to restrain their excesses by the practice of self-denial. It is on the necessity and advantages of this christian virtue that I purpose to expatiate in the following discourse. The indispensable obligation and necessity of restraining the depraved inclinations of nature, and subduing our disorderly passions, shall be the subject of the first point. The most effectual means to succeed herein shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the immaculate Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel Gabriel, *Ave Maria*, &c.

Our Blessed Saviour says, c. x. of St. Matt. that a man's enemies are his own domestics; that is, his own self, his own corrupt nature, his own concupiscence, his own depraved inclinations and disorderly passions. These are the most dangerous enemies which we have to encounter. They deceive us under a thousand disguises, and are apt to render our very devotions liable to a thousand illusions. We have it in our power to keep out of the way of the other enemies of our souls. We can fly from the devil. We can shun the tempting allurements of the world. We can avoid the outward and immediate occasions and incentives of sin, but we cannot fly from these domestic enemies, since we always carry them about us wherever we go. It is necessary then to be prepared to wage a continual war against them, and to be armed with christian vigilance against every irregular symptom of an approaching temptation, that we may come off victorious in the day of battle, and preserve the inestimable treasure of virtue and innocence pure and untainted in the midst of corruption.

To deny the necessity of self-denial and mortification, both inward and outward, both spiritual and corporal, would be to destroy the whole system of christian morality, which teaches us that the foundation of all solid virtue and of true sanctity is to be laid by dying to ourselves, by mortifying our lusts, and by denying our own will, whatever it craves contrary to the will of God. This is the preliminary article, and the first condition that Christ lays down as necessary to enter into his service and to become his disciples. This is the great design of all his commands, of all his counsels, of all his maxims and rules. And it is to this purpose that he declares in the gospel, that he who hates his soul in this world preserves it unto eternal

life, and that no one can be his disciple who does not hate himself, who does not deny himself, who does not die to himself. This doctrine he illustrates by the similitude of a grain of wheat, which must die in the ground before it can bring forth fruit, giving us thereby to understand that self-love, with all its irregular lusts, corrupt inclinations, and depraved appetites, must be crucified, and must die by mortification and self-denial, before we can become truly spiritual and bring forth the fruits of christian virtues. Nothing can be more decisive in this point than the sacred scripture. One time it assures us, that *if we live according to the flesh, we shall die; but if by the spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live.* Another time it declares, that *the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, that it is to be carried by an holy violence to our nature, that we must contend to enter into it by the narrow gate,* in fine, that we must *take up our cross and follow Christ,* that is, according to the exposition of St. Augustine, that we must lead a mortified and penitential life. Such was the doctrine that St. Paul preached to the primitive Christians, when he announced the Gospel of his Divine Master, and exhorted them both by his word and example *to chastise their bodies, and to bear always in themselves a resemblance of the mortification of Jesus Christ.*

And indeed it appears, from their uniform conduct, that they knew no other road to Heaven but self-denial. The lives of the saints and great servants of God in the succeeding ages of the Church, also shew that they were fully convinced of the necessity of self-denial; they considered it as an indispensable duty, a great preservative against vice, a safe guardian of innocence, a powerful means to facilitate the subjection of the passions, and a sovereign antidote and remedy to heal the spiritual maladies and deep wounds which human nature has received from original sin. On the other hand, they looked upon a sensual, voluptuous and Epicurean life, as a manifest contradiction to the rules of the Gospel, and a barefaced violation of the sacred engagements and vows of our baptism. This made Tertullian say, that a Christian who lives up to the rules of the Gospel, and to the vows of his baptism, is a man dead to the deeds of the flesh and to the pomps and vanities of the world; he is a man who is spiritually crucified, and who may truly say like St. Paul, *With Christ I am fastened to the cross: and again, the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.* A Christian is one who has cast off the old man, with all the works of darkness, to clothe himself with the heavenly spirit of humility and meekness of Christ, and to live conformably to the image and likeness of that Divine Original.

This doctrine, I must own, though perfectly sound and orthodox, is not very palatable to those who hearken only to the voice of flesh and blood, especially in the present age,

when luxury is carried to the highest pitch, and the generality of mankind can scarce abide to hear talk of fasting, of abstinence, of self-denials, mortifications, penitential rigours and austerities, much less to practise them. They seem to live as if they had no other end, no other object in view, but self-gratification; no other rule for their conduct but their passions and corrupt inclinations. They consider self-denial as a matter which no way concerns people engaged in the world, and pretend it belongs only to the Clergy, or to such as are consecrated to religion and shut up in a cloister, as if people in the midst of the temptations of the world were less exposed to danger, or stood in less need of works of penance, than those who, to preserve their innocence, retire from the world. Upon this erroneous ground they form a plan of life, fit, as they call it, for civilized persons. They imagine that they are at liberty to pursue pleasure, to live at their ease, to glut themselves with all the comforts of the world, to spend their days agreeably in softness, in merriment, and in a continual circle of idle amusements, diversions and dissipations, provided they give no public scandal, refrain from the gross crimes which brand a person with infamy, keep up to the polite maxims of the age, and practise the social virtues which create esteem. But, my brethren, though such an unmortified life as this may, perhaps, make a moral Heathen, it certainly is not sufficient to constitute a good Christian, nor will it be able to stand the test of the Gospel at the last day; for the very quality of a Christian, and the rule of the Gospel which he solemnly professes, oblige a man to die to himself, to renounce all ungodliness and worldly desires, to live soberly, justly and piously, and to combat and beat down the depraved inclinations of nature by the practice of self-denial and mortification. This obligation extends itself indiscriminately to Christians of all ranks, states and conditions; the Law of God makes no exception; the Prince on the throne can no more plead an exemption than the hermit in the desert, or the religious in his cell. In spite, therefore, of all the refined persuasions of a deluded conscience, in spite of all the specious arguments that are drawn from the artifices and suggestions of self-love, it is most certain that it is the indispensable duty of every Christian to crucify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences, as the Apostle says. It is evident to every one who is acquainted with human nature, that the passions stand in need of a severe curb, and require to be bridled and checked by frequent self-denials; they have taken a wrong bent, and must be thwarted and directed to their proper objects, in order to recover their due rectitude. Unless they are restrained, and kept under proper subjection to the spirit, they will surely rebel, and grow every day more headstrong, more stubborn and ungovernable, insomuch that a man who lets loose the reins of his passions, or takes no pains to counteract and con-

troubling them, becomes at length like unto a downright slave, who is at his master's beck, always ready to obey his orders, let them be ever so extravagant; he is hurried on blindly from one criminal excess to another, and scarce knows where to stop, or how to resist the cravings of corrupt nature. His judgment is strangely biassed, his understanding is clouded, his reason is darkened, his will is perverted, and his affections are misplaced. He sees every thing that regards himself through a fallacious medium, or a kind of perspective, that either magnifies or diminishes the object. He is a stranger to all true peace, content and tranquillity; his mind is disquieted both day and night, and agitated like unto a tempestuous sea. In fine, his heart is incessantly galled and tortured by as many cruel tyrants as he is a slave to different passions. On the contrary, a Christian who conquers himself and governs his passions, is always quiet, settled and composed; he experiences an inward peace and content of mind, with a calm serenity and sweet evenness of soul, that surpasses all the pleasures of sense, all the satisfactions of the world. Every victory he gains over corrupt nature, every vice he subdues, every passion he masters, is, as St. Augustine observes, a step that raises him to a higher degree of perfection, and brings him nearer to the kingdom of Heaven; it entitles him to an increase of God's grace in this life, and to an eternal reward in the next. This made Thomas of Kempis say, that it is more noble and more glorious for a Christian to conquer himself, and to subdue his passions, than to subdue kingdoms and empires. This also made Origen formerly say, that a Christian who rules and commands his passions is a King; his kingdom is within himself, and there he enjoys every thing he wishes and desires. All this plainly shews the utility as well at the necessity of restraining the depraved inclinations of nature, and subduing our disorderly passions. But what are the most effectual means to succeed herein? It is what I promised to lay before you in the second point.

The great Author of nature has given us several different feelings and natural dispositions, for wise and salutary purposes; he intended that we should form these feelings to virtue, and render them instrumental to our eternal salvation, by directing them to their proper objects; but, alas! in the present state of corrupted nature they are generally turned into vices, degenerate into disorderly passions, and are made subservient to numberless sins. Amongst the various passions that men are subject to, there is one passion in particular that commands the rest, and sets them all in motion; this passion is called the predominant or prevailing passion, because it is more strong and more lively, more violent and more imperious than the rest; it is it that usually forms a man's character, disposition, and the complexion of his temper. It is apt to exercise a kind of tyrannical dominion over the sinner, and

like a weight draws his heart away from the love of God to the love of some created object, unless he takes care to correct it and to subject it to the spirit. It must be acknowledged that this is a work attended with no small difficulty, especially in the beginning; however, let the passions be ever so inveterate, ever so obstinate, ever so perverse in their nature, we have it in our power to deliver ourselves from their captivity, and to bring them under proper subjection, with the assistance of God's grace; for, as St. Paul says, Philip. iv. *I can do all things in him who strengthens me; not I, but the grace of God with me.* That our endeavours may be crowned with success, we are to begin with taking a close view of the state of our souls, the first step towards a virtuous life being a true knowledge of ourselves. We are to examine carefully what particular vice influences our actions most, what sinful habit has the greatest empire and ascendancy over us; for the predominant passion or prevailing vice is different in different persons, according to the difference of their humours and natural dispositions. In some the predominant passion is an overbearing pride and an insolent haughtiness; in others it is an insatiable avarice; in some it is a restless ambition; in others a brutal lasciviousness; in some a criminal excess and intemperance in eating and drinking; in others an implacable hatred, anger, and desire of revenge, or some other disorderly passion. When a person has once discovered the particular nature of his predominant passion and favourite vice, he ought to lay the axe to the root of it, and labour in good earnest to destroy sin from its very foundation; he ought to cut off the source that feeds and nourishes his passions; for it is in vain for him to pretend to stop and purify the current, whilst the source is let to run and continues foul and corrupted; in short, he ought above all things to rectify his interior and purify his heart, by eradicating inordinate self-love to the utmost of his power, and by laying a deep foundation of humility. Take away self-love and self-will, says St. Bernard, and you will shut up all the avenues of hell. No evil is more pernicious, or more to be dreaded, than self-love, on account of its strong attachment to sensual objects; it is the greatest enemy of our souls, and the poisonous source of all our vices; it is the root from whence all evil thoughts, all evil desires, and all the passions do spring. *Concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life*, as St. John call it, nay, all the seven capital sins, are but so many different branches of self-love; it is planted in the heart of man, and ingrafted, as it were, on human nature since the fall of our first parents; it is there, of course, that self-denial and mortification should strike the first blow.

The passions may be combated, then, with some prospect of success, not all together, but separately, one after the other, it being much easier to conquer and defeat an enemy when his forces are divided than when they are united, according to the

old axiom, *Divide and conquer*. The predominant passion is the first that should be encountered, for if it once gives way there is reason to hope, with the blessing of God, that the whole superstructure and fabric of iniquity will soon fall to the ground; it is, as it were, the champion and commander of all the other passions; consequently, when it is once overthrown and brought under subjection, the rest of the passions may be easily vanquished and subdued, as the Philistians were readily conquered and put to flight when Goliath their champion was slain; or as all the other cities and inferior towns of a kingdom are readily compelled to surrender, when the capital and strongest city is captured and reduced to obedience; but if the predominant passion be spared and indulged in the heart, little or no success will attend our endeavours to subdue the other subordinate passions, which are supported by it; any attempt we may happen to make for this purpose will, according to the comparison of St. Augustine, only resemble the feeble efforts of a man who would pretend to dry up a torrent of water, without stopping the source that constantly supplies it; or who would take upon him to clear a piece of ground by lopping off the branches of a tree, and leaving the trunk and root in the ground to shoot up again.

This accounts for the constant falls and manifest inconsistencies of so many Christians, who continue always the same fickle and relapsing sinners, ever promising and resolving, but never performing or executing. Like unhappy Saul, who slew the subjects and spared Agag their King, they spare their predominant passion, which replunges them into their former extravagancies; they refuse to sacrifice that disguised pride, that vain-glory, that avarice, that ambition, that lechery, that envy, that vicious self-love, which reigns and domineers in their hearts. They make, indeed, at times, a few weak efforts to subdue some of their passions, but they do not begin at the source; they do not purify the spring; they do not remove the principal cause of their spiritual disorders; they unfortunately indulge their favourite vice, and cherish their predominant and darling passion. They will readily perform what belongs to the exterior of religion, but they will not be prevailed on to pardon an injury, to bear an offence, or put up with an affront. They have courage enough to fast, to abstain, and to multiply the outward exercises of piety and devotion, but at the same time they overlook and neglect their interior. They pay little or no attention to the spiritual mortification of their own will and criminal affections. It is true, the exterior mortification of the body, and the outward practices of religion, are powerful helps and necessary means to expiate sin, to subdue the passions, and to attain to the inward mortification of the spirit, and therefore they should not be neglected; but the spiritual mortification of the interior should be chiefly attended to, as it is more meritorious, more essential, and more indispensably necessary.

God requires to be worshipped in spirit and truth, interiorly as well as exteriorly. The heart and interior is what he principally regards; if it be vicious, unmortified, and infected with the poison of pride and self-love, we may fast, we may pray, we may mortify the flesh as much as the ancient hermits and recluses have done in the desert; our fasts, our abstinences, our long prayers and corporal mortifications, will turn to no account; they will remain without merit, without reward, unless they are accompanied with the inward mortification of the spirit, and rectified by a pure intention; they will find no acceptance with God, but will be despised and rejected by him, as the Prophet Isaias tells us, c. lviii, the outward offerings and sacrifices of the Jews were formerly despised and rejected, on account of their unmortified spirit. Hence St. Jerome says, Ep. ad Oel. It will avail you nothing to emaciate your body with fasting, if your mind be puffed up with pride; it will profit you nothing to be pale with abstinence, if under this fair outside and appearance of virtue, your heart be black and blue with envy and malice. Those very actions which the world admires most, and which appear most brilliant in the eyes of men, will be deemed in the eyes of God no better than false and pharisaical virtues, if the intention and motive with which they are performed be nothing but vain-glory, ostentation and human respect.

Unless, therefore, my brethren, we have a mind to run the risk of finding our hands empty at the last day, and of losing the fruits of all our labours for ever, we must above all things take care to cultivate our interior, to regulate all the motions of our hearts, and to beware of being influenced and actuated in our proceedings by any sinister views or improper motives. The passions and vices which we wish to conquer and subdue, are to be counteracted and controlled by frequent acts of the different virtues, which are directly opposite and contrary to them; for example, we are to oppose acts of humility to pride, acts of liberality to covetousness, acts of patience to anger, acts of fraternal charity to envy. Every thing that is apt to inflame the passions and to excite them to revolt, ought to be shunned, though it should happen to be as dear to a person as the very apple of his eye. The outward senses require also to be watched and guarded. It was by the lust of the senses that sin first entered into the world; they are the organs and instruments whereby the passions are frequently awakened and roused, when otherwise they would lie dormant like fire under the ashes; they are the inlets, avenues and windows of the soul, by which sin usually breaks in and makes its way to the soul, when they are not carefully guarded and protected. Besides these precautions, it is necessary to direct the passions to their proper objects; for example, that love which is blindly bestowed on the creature should be directed to the Creator; that hatred which is conceived against an enemy, should be levelled against

our sins, which are our greatest enemies; they should be made the object of our grief, of our sorrow, and of our tears. Instead of being afflicted for the loss of temporal goods, we should change the object and bewail the loss of God's grace. Instead of fearing the frowns, menaces and unmerited censures of men, we should above all things dread the terrible judgments of God. Instead of coveting the perishable riches of this transitory life, we should thirst after the spiritual riches of eternal glory. An habitual sense of the divine presence, devout meditation on the sacred passion of our Divine Redeemer, frequent recourse to the holy sacraments and fountains of grace, a daily examination of conscience, not only in general, but in particular, with regard to the predominant passion and customary vices that are to be conquered; in fine, humble and fervent prayers are likewise recommended by spiritual writers, as so many powerful means to succeed in the conquest of the passions, and gain a complete victory over all the enemies of the soul. Excite in us, O Lord, a spirit of Christian mortification, and enable us to crucify the flesh with its vices and concupiscences. Thou formerly didst deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, deliver us, we beseech thee, from the tyrannical empire of self-love, and from the slavery of those predominant passions which lead so many souls astray, and draw them from the pursuit of virtue. Give us grace to resist all the solicitations of this sinful Babylon, and to restrain all the impetuosities of flesh and blood. O may the fire of thy divine love inflame our hearts, and inspire us with courage and zeal to combat successfully for that never-fading Crown of glory which is prepared in the kingdom of Heaven for those who conquer. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

On the Rigour and Duration of the Pains of Hell.

Colligite zizania et alligate ea in fasciculos ad comburendum.

S. Mat. c. xiii. v. 30.

Gather the tares together, and bind them into bundles to burn.

S. Mat. c. xiii. v. 30.

OUR Divine Redeemer, in the Gospel of this day, compares the kingdom of Heaven, or his Church here on earth, to a field sowed with good seed and producing good wheat, but intermixt with pernicious tares and weeds until the harvest time, when the good grain is separated from the bad and lodged in the

husbandman's barn, and the tares and weeds are bound up into bundles and cast into the fire to burn. St. Augustine brings down this parable to prove against the Novatians and Donatists, that in the Church of Jesus Christ there will be always good and bad, just and unjust, vessels of election and children of perdition, intermixt together, until the end of the world and the day of judgment, when the dreadful separation is to take place, and the just and faithful servants of God, like unto a rich crop, are to be carried by the Angels into the Mansions of eternal Bliss; and on the contrary the wicked, like unto noxious weeds and tares, bound up into bundles at the harvest-time, shall be gathered together and thrown into the fire of hell, to burn for ever. Such, alas! is to be the sad fate of sinners, who, being graciously called to the inheritance of the kingdom of Heaven, render themselves unworthy of so great a blessing by the immorality of their lives. Such is the unhappy lot of those wicked Christians who abandon themselves to vice, and who neglect the practice of virtue; who lead a life openly criminal and irregular, and who lead a life altogether unprofitable and barren in good works. They shall be cast into exterior darkness, and for ever deprived of the light of glory and the sight of God. They shall be plunged into an abyss of perpetual night, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; where they shall suffer the most excruciating torments for millions of years, and when these are past, for as many millions more. Their misery will always begin, but never end; it will be as lasting as an eternity. May the Lord of his infinite goodness, preserve every one here present from an experimental knowledge of these terrifying truths, and from being condemned to such insupportable torments. Alas! my brethren, would not the greatest part of us all be involved in this misfortune, if God had not hitherto spared us? Would we not be confined now in the burning prisons of hell, had he immediately inflicted on us the just punishment due to our sins, the very instant we presumed to offend him? Thanks to his boundless mercy, the arrest of our condemnation is still suspended for some time, and we have it yet in our power to escape so rigorous a sentence by means of a sincere conversion. Let us profit of so great a favour, and for this end let us enter in spirit into those fiery furnaces, and consider attentively what the reprobate suffer there. The rigorous torments which the damned endure in hell, and the duration of these torments, shall be the two points of this discourse. The rigorous torments of hell shall be the first point; the duration of these torments shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favourable attention. Let us previously implore the assistance of Heaven, through the intercession of the blessed Mother of Jesus, greeting her with the words of the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The Royal Prophet, in his livth Psalm, exhorts us to descend

in thought into hell, whilst we live; and St. Bernard, in his exposition of this Psalm, gives the following reason for it, that a frequent meditation on this frightful mansion of the reprobate, may prevent us falling into it after our death. Holy Job practised this lesson, when he said, c. vii. Hell is my place of abode, and I have made for myself a bed in this abyss of darkness. Let us then, thy brethren, approach this mansion of horror and misery; let us enter into it, if possible, with the same sentiments which the damned now have of its insupportable torments. But, alas! who can comprehend, says St. Augustine, what a damned soul comprehends? Who can form, by the most profound meditation, the same idea which it has of its present unhappy state in the midst of hell's devouring flames? Let us at least endeavour to form to ourselves such an idea as will convince us *how horrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God*, as St. Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Hebrews, c. x. O how unhappy and deplorable is the condition of a soul in this state of reprobation? It sees it has lost God, and is condemned as an unhappy victim to unquenchable fire. It has lost God! O shocking and irreparable loss? Who can comprehend it? To give you a just notion of it, it would be necessary to represent to you what an happiness it is to possess God, and to make you understand what he is in himself, that you might conceive how great are the pleasures, raptures and extasies, which attend the enjoyment of him. But if the great St. Paul, though rapt up to the third Heaven, tells us that the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the unspeakable joys which God has prepared in Heaven for his chosen servants, you are not to expect that I can give you an adequate idea of this supreme felicity. To be sensible, however, of the unspeakable misery which is the result of being deprived of the inexpressible happiness of possessing God, we need but consider that God is a being infinite in every perfection; in him is concentrated all that is amiable, all that is estimable; he is an immense ocean of all delights, of all pleasure, of all joy, of all content. Judge then, how unhappy and how deplorable the condition of the reprobate souls must be, when they see themselves deprived of this supreme good, of this unspeakable happiness, through their own fault. If they still exist, existence is to them but an additional torment, as they only retain it to make them eternally sensible that they have lost their God, and in losing him they have lost all the goods of nature, all the goods of grace, and all the goods of glory. To be reduced to their primitive nothing would be to them far more pleasing than to live only to be thus overwhelmed with a deluge of misery, and to be made eternally sensible of the inexpressible loss they have suffered, in having lost their God and sovereign good.

But this is not the only punishment of the damned souls, Sensible torments, the most violent, the most intense and the

most acute, increase their pains beyond expression. We have a frightful idea given us of those torments in the sentence which Jesus Christ will pronounce on the day of the general judgment against the reprobate; *Begone from me ye accursed into eternal fire.* Is there any torture so dreadful in itself as to be burnt alive with a raging fire? We have often heard of a fire raging with such violence as to reduce great buildings in a few hours to a heap of ashes. What are the endeavours of a distressed family in such circumstances to escape the fury of the flames? What sighs, what clamours, what piteous lamentations? What violent efforts, what trouble, what despair? If any one happens by a melancholy accident to be surprised on a sudden, and to be burnt alive, does not the bare recital hereof make us tremble? When we read of some of the holy martyrs being cast into caldrons of boiling oil, or extended on glowing gridirons and burning coals, do we not shudder at the very thoughts hereof? If the picture be so frightful and terrifying, what must the real torment be? Fire is the most rigorous punishment that human justice can inflict for the most atrocious crimes, and when the Almighty resolved to extirpate the infamous inhabitants of Sodom and Ghomerrha, he caused showers of fire to descend from Heaven on these unfortunate cities. But this fire was only a slight prelude of the eternal flames of hell, every other fire being no more than a painted fire in comparison of it, as St. Augustine speaks.

We read in the lives of the ancient recluses, of a certain holy religious man, that, whenever he was tempted to sin, he was accustomed to touch fire with his finger, and finding himself obliged to withdraw it instantly, he said to himself, If for a moment I cannot bear this transitory pain in my finger, how could I endure for all eternity the flames of hell fire penetrating my very soul and torturing every part of my whole body? This thought touched him. It excited his zeal and animated his fervour. He had it constantly present in his mind, and it was enough to sweeten all the rigours of solitude, all the austerities of the cloister, and to make him resist every temptation of the devil, the world, and the flesh. Astinence, fasting, maceration of the body, retreat, silence, long prayers, painful and fatiguing exercises of penance and devotion, seemed no longer difficult to him.

Are ye not, my brethren, threatened with the same fire? Have you not more reason to fear it than this faithful servant of God? You who are so much alarmed at the misfortunes and sufferings of this life, that you constantly endeavour to prevent them, and still you labour so little to escape the sufferings of the next life? You, who are slaves to your passions, who pamper a body that must soon return to dust and ashes, and who indulge yourselves in all that is pleasing to sense and agreeable to your inclinations? You who are deluded by the world, and its fawning pleasures and deceitful

charms, who pass your days unprofitably in a round of frivolous amusements, without bestowing a serious reflection on the important affair of your salvation? The present time wholly engages your attention, and you think not of the dreadful time to come. O what excuse will you plead when the fatal moment of death arrives, and when you are summoned to appear before the bar of divine justice? When God will pronounce sentence of condemnation against impenitent sinners, and confine them within the deep dungeons and burning prisons of hell, which of you will be able to dwell in such a painful habitation? Who among ye, cries out the Prophet Isaias, c. 33. will be able to endure everlasting burning? Will it be those men of pleasure, who allow themselves every liberty that a sensual appetite can desire? Will it be those women of fashion, who are of so delicate a constitution that they cannot at present undergo the least mortification? A light fit of sickness seems now to them insupportable. To speak to them of the observance of the fast days commanded by the Church, is, if you believe themselves, to demand a thing impossible. To impose on them a necessary penance for the expiation of their sins and the subduing of their passions, is to load them with too heavy a burden. To deprive them of some idle amusements, to lay them under some little restraint on certain occasions, is to make life quite disagreeable to them. They are not made to such practices. They are above their strength. Their delicacy, their weakness is such, that they say, they are not able to bear so heavy a load. But, my brethren, this delicacy, this weakness, to which you listen so much when it is necessary to give sanction to your indolence and sloth, or to apologise for your neglect of duty, and your impatience in sufferings; this same delicacy, why do you not consult it when you expose yourselves to the danger of falling into the flames of hell? Those furnaces, those lakes, those pools, those gulphs of liquid fire, have they nothing dreadful, nothing frightful to deter you from falling into them?

Descend, I beseech ye, in thought, into those abysses, which perhaps God will soon open under your feet, to plunge ye into them, unless ye repent speedily. Descend, then, beforehand, and examine, what will ye find there? You will find monsters of impiety and irreligion. You will find crowds of cursers, swearers and blasphemers. You will find letchers, adulterers and fornicators, drunkards, detractors, extortioners, and a multitude of other impenitent sinners like unto you. You are now perhaps what they have been, whilst they were here on earth, and unless ye reform your lives, ye will be one day what they now are in that frightful prison, into which their final impenitence has unhappily led them.

Descend again in thought into those abysses, and what will ye find there? An unquenchable fire, which, as the Prophet Isaias speaks, c. xxx. the breath of God has kindled to punish

the reprobate. You will find there a fire, which though terrible in its own nature, is far more dreadful, as it is in the hand of God the instrument of his formidable vengeance; for his all-powerful hand elevates it above its natural force and activity, and communicates to it a miraculous virtue, by which it can affect and penetrate the souls as well as the bodies of the reprobate in the most painful and sensible manner, and that without consuming them. Ah! sinners, have you ever comprehended what it is to have the whole force of the all-powerful hand of God against ye? His supreme power is without limits. It passes all the bounds of nature, and from this truth what frightful consequences are to be drawn?

They are these. First, that the fire of hell is infinitely more active than the common fire, which we have here on earth. Yes, my brethren, Mount Etna, Mount Vesuvius, and those other sulphureous mountains and volcanoes, which belch forth torrents of liquid flame, and spread terror and desolation all over the neighbouring plains; that burning rain which fell from Heaven on Sodom and Ghomorrha, and reduced that populous country into a heap of ashes; the furnace of Babylon, whose flames mounted forty cubits high, all these, says St. Bernard, are but as small sparks of that most dreadful fire which God has prepared in his wrath to punish the reprobate in hell.

The second consequence is, that the fire of hell, for its rigour, is far above all the torments that we can suffer in this world. Let your imagination represent to you all that is terrifying. Assemble in your mind all that the cruelty of tyrants has invented, and all that the patience of martyrs has been able to endure; that is to say, form to yourselves an idea of pains the most acute, of punishments the most sensible and lingering, of tortures the most violent and racking, and all kinds of death more cruel than any human tongue can express; all these deserve not the name of torments, if compared to the devouring fire of hell; so that could the same man, at the same time, suffer these various tortures, his sufferings, as St. Augustine says, would be as nothing, if compared to the sufferings of a damned soul, *non parva sed nulla*. And why so? The reason is obvious, because all the sufferings of this life, however violent they may be, are but the effects of natural causes, which have a limited force and virtue; but in this infernal fire it is the all-powerful arm of God that discharges the whole weight of its vengeance on the reprobate; so that their punishment must be as dreadful as his power is infinite.

The third and last consequence is, that all the transitory evils which affect us in this life, are, to speak in the scripture language, but as some small drops of that deluge of misery with which the damned are overwhelmed in hell, Dan. ix. They are but light strokes of Divine justice, the present time being a time of grace and mercy. What then must it be,

when God will chastise sinners in his fury? If one drop, says St. Jerom, makes so sensible an impression, what must it be when whole showers of his rage will fall upon them? What must it be when his fury will break out as an impetuous torrent, or as a rapid river which overflows its banks, and carries terror and desolation with it on every side? It is then you will learn, O sinners, by woful experience, what it is to exhaust the bounty of God, to abuse his mercy, to resist his graces, to reject his calls, and to tire his patience. At present his mercy withholds the thunderbolts of his indignation, but then his justice will cry out for vengeance; it will convince you that he is a God who knows how to punish rebellious and impenitent sinners at a proper time, and that as he rewards the good in Heaven with a boundless liberality, so he will punish the reprobate in Hell with the utmost rigour, and inflict torments without mercy. We have now considered the rigour of the torments of hell, let us briefly consider their duration. 2. P.

All our sufferings in this world have this peculiar to them, that they are one day to have an end, and this affords us some consolation even in the midst of our most violent pains; but in hell the torments are rigorous beyond what we can comprehend or imagine; and what makes them still more insupportable is, that they are to be everlasting. O unfortunate sinners, who now make so little account of the zealous efforts of the Preachers of the Gospel, when they endeavour to give you an idea of the pains of hell; the time will come when you will be convinced that all they have said, or could say, is but a faint representation of what these pains are in reality. You will then be overwhelmed with grief, to find that he who will drive you from his presence, is that same God who, during the course of your life, had nothing but bowels of mercy and compassion for you. You will be then covered with shame and confusion to find, that your Divine Redeemer, who spilt his blood and gave his life for your salvation, will then have nothing but thunderbolts in his hands to punish your crying sins. You then foam with rage, and cry out with regret, O transitory pleasures! O base voluptuousness! O perishable riches! Ye cost me very dear! Must I for ye be banished from Heaven, be rejected and hated by my Creator, and forfeit my right to an everlasting inheritance? Must I, for a vain momentary satisfaction, be for ever deprived of the enjoyment of my God, and eternally excluded from the joys and delights of Paradise, and from the amiable company of the blessed Angels and Saints? O what has my pride, what has my vanity, what have all my past pleasures and worldly enjoyments availed me? Such, alas! are the doleful lamentations of the damned; such are the fatal consequences of violating the sacred laws, and transgressing the commandments of the Lord; such are the dire effects of yielding to the deadly sins

of pride, covetousness, lechery, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth ! O mortal sin, how frightful must thou be, since the unhappy offenders are to dwell for ever in a lake of flames, in the midst of a devouring fire, and that without resource, without the least consolation, without the least mitigation of their pains. O my brethren, if twenty-four hours of a violent gravel, gout, tooth ache, or head ache, seem so long and tedious, what must it be to burn in flames of fire with legions of merciless devils, and to burn eternally ? Reflect seriously on this, ye who give full scope to your passions, and live without rule, without restraint, without faith, without religion. Consider how deplorable must the condition of the damned be, who, filled with the idea of eternity, are ascertained that after burning a hundred years in this mansion of misery, they must still burn a hundred more, and when the second century is ended they must begin a third, a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth, and so on without ever stopping. Nay, after ten thousand years, a hundred thousand years, a hundred thousand millions of years have past over a hundred thousand millions of times, the fire of hell will be still as violent, their souls and bodies will be still as sensible of the pains, and God will be still as incensed and as irreconcilable as in the beginning, and at the very first instant of their damnation.

You are seized with horror, when you are told that a bird, which only once in a thousand years would carry away one single drop of sea water, or an atom of earth, would drain up the ocean and level all the mountains of the universe, before the punishment of the damned would be at an end ; but I tell you now, that their punishment at the expiration of this immense term of years, will be still as if it had only begun that instant ; I tell you moreover, that as many hundred thousand millions of years would pass away, as there are moments in a hundred thousand millions of ages ; and that as many seas would be drained as there are drops of water in the ocean, and as many mountains would be levelled in the aforesaid manner, as there are atoms in the air, stars in the firmament, sands in the sea, and creatures in the universe, before the duration of the punishment of the damned would be abridged, or in the least diminished ; nay, such a prodigious number of years and ages, compared to eternity, would not be even one week, one day, one hour. It would, says St. Augustine, be as nothing at all. If, after such an immense space of time, an Angel descended into hell to assure the damned, on the part of God, that they only had as many millions of ages to suffer, as they had suffered moments till that present juncture, hell would be no longer hell, and nothing would be heard in it but praises, blessings, and acts of thanksgiving. But, alas ! they are well assured that they never are to hear of their deliverance, never of any peace, never of any truce, never of any reconciliation ; no term, no end, no hopes of an end. They must burn as

long as the saints will be happy, as long as God will be immutable, as long as God will be God, without the least prospect of ever having any other habitation but a fiery dungeon, any other bed but a bed of fire, any other air to breathe but sulphur and scorching flames, or any other company but legions of infernal furies.

It was this terrifying truth that made St. Augustine cry out, in his Book of Soliloquies, O Eternity! Eternity! Eternity! He that reflects attentively on thy duration, and does not repent and reform his life, must be void of faith; or if he still retains a superficial and languishing faith, he certainly acts as if he were destitute of reason, sense and understanding. The very saints themselves were so deeply penetrated, and so sensibly affected with the thoughts of this incomprehensible mystery, that they spent their days in the severest exercises of penance and mortification; they judged no labour too difficult, no austerity too great, no penance too rigorous, whereby an eternity of misery might be prevented, and an eternity of bliss acquired. King David tells us, that he made eternity the subject of his most profound reflections. The great St. Jerom was so terrified at the thoughts of eternity, that he ceased not, like the humble publican in the Gospel, to strike his breast with compunction, and to call on Heaven for mercy. It was a lively apprehension of eternity that formerly peopled the deserts with anchorets, and drew so many thousands into solitudes and caverns, remote from human society, where they macerated their flesh and practised all the rigours of a penitential life. To conclude, then, my brethren, let me exhort you to make eternity the subject of your serious meditation; descend frequently in thought into hell whilst you are alive, that you may not descend into it when you are dead. Let that raging fire extinguish in your hearts the fire of concupiscence, and kindle in them the fire of divine charity. O what will it avail you to gratify your passions, to indulge your senses, to wallow in filthy pleasures, nay, even to gain the whole universe, if at your dying hour the gates of Heaven be shut in your face, and your souls be plunged into hell fire? If there be any sinners in this congregation whose conscience flies in their face, and tells them that they are involved in the dismal state or habit of mortal sin, let me conjure them by the bowels of Jesus Christ, to sleep no longer in the arms of perdition, to remain no longer on the brink of hell, to expose themselves no longer to the imminent danger of eternal damnation. Let me entreat them to arise speedily out of the mire of iniquity, and throw themselves with confidence at the feet of God's mercy. Let me beseech them to repent of their sins in time, that they may not have reason to repent in vain for a never-ending eternity. Let me entreat them to renounce those odious vices and detestable habits which render them a disgrace to religion and a reproach to Christianity.

O sweetest Jesus, inspire us all with a feeling sense of these important truths; be thou a Jesus to us, and save our miserable souls. Let not the fruits and merits of thy sacred Passion be lost on us, but bring us to the happy end for which we have been created and ransomed with thy precious blood. Thou art the Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world; take from us whatever is displeasing to thee, and give us what is conducive to our eternal happiness. Grant that we may treasure up a provision of good works for a blessed eternity, and that we may be found worthy on the last day to be admitted into those sacred mansions of bliss, which thou hast purchased for us at the expence of thy life. And which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

On the Nature of a true and perfect Repentance.

Simile est Regnum Cœlorum grano Sinapis,—*S. Mat. c. xiii. v. 31.*

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Grain of Mustard Seed.

S. Mat. c. xiii. v. 31.

BY the Kingdom of Heaven, mentioned in the Gospel of this day, is generally understood the Spiritual Kingdom or Church of Jesus Christ and his heavenly doctrine, of which a grain of mustard seed is said to bear some resemblance; for as the mustard seed, though one of the smallest grains before it is sowed, yet when it is sowed and takes root in the earth grows to a considerable height, especially in hot climates, such as Syria and Palestine, and becomes a large tree with such extensive branches, that they serve as a retreat for *the birds of the air*, as the gospel expresses it; so in like manner the Church of Christ, though small and inconsiderable in its origin, and confined to a corner of Judea in the beginning, made so stupendous a progress in a short time, and grew into so lofty and large a tree, that it extended its branches all over the known world, and that the birds of the air, that is, the Sovereigns and Potentates of the earth, took shelter under it, and subjected themselves to its direction. It spread itself with amazing succes from East to West, and in a few years comprehended within its pale those very nations, tribes and people, who at first opposed it with all their power. Thus was verified the prediction of the Royal Prophet in his second Psalm, v. 8. where he introduces the Eternal Father speaking of Christ and his Church, and saying, *I will give thee the*

nations for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Christ himself is the supreme Head of his Church, and all the faithful are his members, and form one mystical body, linked together and animated by one and the same spirit. He governs and protects his Church with the most endearing attention, meekness and sweetness, and abundantly supplies it with all necessities for its welfare. *He loves his Church,* says St. Paul, Ephes. c. v. v. 25, 26. *and delivered himself for it, that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the laver of water, in the word of life.* It is by his merits that our souls are cleansed from original sin in the Sacrament of Baptism, and from the actual sins that are afterwards committed, provided we sincerely repent of them, and have recourse to his mercy with the necessary dispositions. This is what the Apostle zealously exhorts all sinners to, Acts, c. iii. v. 19, where he says, *Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* But the great misfortune of the sinner is, as St. John Chrysostom observes, that he can never be absolutely assured in this life of the validity of his repentance, although he is well assured of the reality of his sins, and that repentance is absolutely necessary to blot them out. What renders his condition truly deplorable is, that often his very repentance itself should be no less a subject of anxiety to him than his sins, because it is only a true and sincere repentance that can save the sinner; and on the other hand, there are a thousand other repentances either false or vain, imperfect or insincere, and insufficient for salvation. If then the sinner happens to be deceived; if for want of proper discernment he mistakes a false repentance for a true one; if he counts on that as sufficient, which is really defective, from that moment he may be ranked amongst the most unfortunate of sinners, because his very repentance, which should be the means of his justification, becomes, by a sacrilegious abuse of a sacrament, one of the causes of his ruin and perdition. This, my brethren, is what our holy religion teaches, and what should make every sinner tremble. My present design, therefore, is to instruct you in this essential duty, and to lay before you the nature of a true and perfect repentance. It is a true sorrow of the heart which hates, detests and destroys sin, and moves the sinner to satisfy the justice of the offended Deity. To be truly penitent you must then have a true sorrow of heart, and you must endeavour to satisfy God's justice by works of penance and mortification; in short, the necessity of a true sorrow of heart, and the necessity of penitential works. These are the two points of this discourse, and the entire subject of your favourable attention. Let us previously invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin Mary, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The heart, says St. John Chrysostom, is the first source of virtue and of vice; it is in it that all sins are formed, and have

their birth and subsistence. From it come forth evil thoughts, thefts, murders and adulteries, as our blessed Saviour speaks, Matt. c. xv. It is the heart that makes the eyes subservient to impurity, the ears to detraction, the tongue to slander and blasphemy, and the hands to dishonesty, injustice and cruelty. All the senses, all the faculties of the body are but servile instruments, that only act as influenced, directed and governed by the heart, according to its own perverse inclinations. This being supposed, since the heart is the first and principal criminal, and the first that feels the sordid pleasure of sin, it is most just, as Tertullian says, that it should be first punished, and the first to feel a bitter sorrow and sincere regret, for having consented to sin, with a firm resolution to sin no more. It must hate and detest sin above all things, not precisely because it is odious and detestable in itself, but because it is an offence of God and a violation of his sacred law. This detestation, this grief, this regret, must necessarily be lodged in the heart of the penitent sinner; without it every other kind of repentance is vain, unprofitable and insufficient to root up and destroy sin; for sin being a voluntary preference of the creature before the Creator, or a free choice, and an inordinate love formed in the heart of the sinner, by which he loves some fleeting good, some perishable object, preferably to his last end and supreme happiness, it is only by an opposite hatred, formed in the heart, that sin can be totally vanquished and destroyed. Hence the Almighty demands of us, by the Prophet Joel, an heart torn with grief and sorrow, as the only sacrifice capable to appease his wrath and indignation. *Turn to me, says the Lord, Joel, c. ii. v. 12. in fasting, mourning and weeping, and tear your hearts and not your garments.* And again, *Be converted to me in your whole heart.*

Although you should then, my brethren, strike your breasts a thousand times, though you should raise your hands to Heaven, and deliver yourselves in the most moving, most pathetic terms to implore the divine mercy, though the air should echo with your sighs, though rivulets of tears should flow from your eyes, if the body only be in a state of humiliation, if the mouth only speaks, if the eyes only weep and the heart still remains silent, still unmoved, still obdurate, your repentance is vain and unprofitable, and it will never move God to look down on you with a favourable eye of mercy. The first victim he demands of you is the heart, an heart truly penitent and contrite, pierced with a bitter sorrow for having offended him. It is true, sighs, tears, exterior acts of contrition, humiliations of the body, and the like outward performances, are sometimes the effects and marks of a true inward sorrow of the heart, but not always; for it is certain, that they are consistent with an heart wholly unchanged, and often subsist with a secret and criminal attachment to sin, since they frequently have nothing but mere self-love, servile fear, and motives purely human and

natural for their foundation. A lively apprehension, a violent fear, a tenderness of complexion, may naturally force tears and sighs from a person, without working any conversion in the heart, as appears in the unfortunate Antiochus, who, as we read in the 2d. Book of Machabees, implored the divine mercy with many tears, and gave all the outward marks of sincere repentance, though at the same time the Lord, who is the Searcher of hearts, saw no real conversion or change in his heart; for had his heart been truly changed and converted, he would undoubtedly have obtained the mercy he prayed for, and which, as the Scripture assures us, he never obtained.

Who could seem more penitent than Achab, the wicked King of Israel? He tore his royal garments asunder in sign of repentance; he mortified his flesh, he fasted, he slept on ashes and sackcloth, he was not ashamed to appear before his subjects in this state of debasement, he was willing his penance should be as public as were his crimes; notwithstanding, because the unfortunate Prince, in all his outward mortifications, had more at heart his own private interest than the interest of his God, whom he had so grievously offended, his repentance was rejected by Heaven, though the execution of the sentence pronounced against him was suspended until the time of his death, on account of his having assumed the exterior of a penitent. Be no longer deceived, then, my brethren, in a matter of such importance; a mere outward lip repentance is not sufficient to blot out your sins; as long as you cherish a real affection for them in your heart you will not, you cannot be forgiven.

You, therefore, who have the misfortune to be grievous sinners like Achab, and but counterfeit penitents, have every reason to fear the just but formidable judgments of Heaven. If your God is silent at present, if he seems to overlook your heinous crimes, and to suspend the execution of the dreadful sentence he has already pronounced against blasphemers, detractors, fornicators and drunkards, it is perhaps, to punish you with greater rigour at your dying hour. Do not imagine, then that a superficial repentance, or an historical detail of your sins at the sacred tribunal of confession, or a few exterior practises of piety and exercises of religion, will screen you from sharing in the eternal punishment of the reprobate hereafter. If you sincerely wish to appease the indignation of Heaven, and to cancel and efface your crimes in the sight of God, you must be penetrated with a true penitential sorrow, which is incompatible with an attachment to vice; you must have a supernatural sorrow that will banish the love of sin; you must have a sincere interior sorrow in your heart for having offended God, with a fixed and determined resolution to offend him no more.

In effect, my brethren, what should you grieve for if you grieve not for having offended so good a God, by transgressing

his commandments? The loss of your innocence, the death of your soul, the enmity of your Creator, the precious blood of your Divine Redeemer profaned, the glory of Heaven forfeited, an hell prepared for all your crimes; all these moving and affecting objects assembled in your mind, shall they be incapable to make an impression on your hearts? Did you but meditate attentively on these two words, *Peccavi Domino*, which King David formerly said to the Prophet Nathan, and which since have often pierced the hearts of many other true penitents, *I have sinned against the Lord*, your hearts would also be touched with compunction, and you would be excited to weep night and day for your sins as they did. What! my brethren, *Peccavi Domino*, I have sinned against the Lord, I have rebelled against my God, I have offended my most bountiful Benefactor, I have trampled on his sacred laws, I have repaid all his favours with the blackest ingratitude, I have broken through all the ties by which I was united to him; he is my Creator, and I have unhappily forgotten that I am his creature; I was his child, and I have disowned him for a father; he has been my Saviour, he has died for me on a cross, and I have without remorse re-crucified him. Prevented by his graces, loaded with his favours, I have only made use of all his blessings to offend him, I have only made them serve to the ruin and damnation of my soul. Were these reflections duly present to your mind, you would cry out with heartfelt grief, O what evil deserves our tears, but sin? O what should make us weep and lament, if it be not sin? Sin, base and detestable sin, that disfigures the soul, and changes its beauty into loathsome deformity; sin, that degrades man, who was but *little inferior to the Angels*, as the Scripture says, and reduces him to the condition of the devils, who are only devils because infected with sin; sin, that renders us the horror of Heaven, the disgrace of the earth, and the prey of hell. If we call to mind every misfortune in this life that can afflict a human soul, we shall find in sin misfortunes of the same kind, or still far greater. You grieve if you have lost the fruits of your past services, labours and fatigues; you lose by sin all the fruits of your former good works. You grieve if you are exiled and forced to quit your native country; by sin you are banished from your happy home and native country, the kingdom of Heaven. You grieve if you have lost your reputation and are branded with infamy; by sin you become vile despicable objects in the sight of God and his Angels. You grieve if you are enslaved and deprived of your liberty; by sin you become slaves of the devil, and are liable to be imprisoned for ever in the fiery dungeons of hell. You grieve if confined to your bed by a malignant infirmity; by sin you are mortally wounded, and may perhaps be soon condemned to burn with merciless devils in unquenchable flames. You grieve for the loss of a spouse, a parent, a friend; by sin you lose your God, who is

both a spouse, a most affectionate father, and the best of friends. You have then in sin all that is capable to afflict the human heart, and yet, alas! numberless heinous sins, blasphemies, perjuries, curses, injustices, and criminal excesses, make less impression on the hearts of many, than some trivial temporal misfortune which scarce deserves their attention. O God offended, O justice of Heaven irritated, what will become of those unhappy sinners whose grief is but imaginary, and whose resolutions to destroy sin and to remove the causes of it, are ineffectual, and pass no farther than the lips? How many are there whose grief is but the working of pride and self-love, or a natural trouble and anxiety, proceeding merely from the fear of punishment? How many will you find who see nothing hateful in sin itself, and only relinquish it because it opens hell before them, and menaces them with eternal miseries; How many are there who only renounce sin exteriorly, and at the same time harbour and retain an affection for it in their hearts, like unto a valetudinarian, who with reluctance abstains from certain meats and liquors he is fond of, merely because they are judged to be hurtful to his health? If they are sorry for their sins, their sorrow amounts to no more than a wish they could sin with impunity; like mercenary slaves they regard nothing but threats and the torments of an hereafter; and were there no hell they would live like atheists, without faith, without religion or conscience. Like the wife of Loth, they hate not the city of Sodom nor the crimes committed therein; but they dread the fire and sulphur that rained down upon it from Heaven. They are ready to commit any sin which they think is not mortal, because they believe it will not damn them; but, alas! the offence and insult offered to God is a matter they totally disregard. The fear of hell, I must own is in itself good and useful; according to the comparison of St. Augustine, it serves in the beginning to introduce charity or the love of God into the heart, as a needle serves to introduce thread into a cloth that is sown; it is a preparation for repentance, but it is by no means the essence or substance of it. It must be tempered with love, like the fear of a favourite child; for as it was love that made you sinners, it is love only that can make you true penitents. It was love that carried your hearts away from God, and bestowed them on the creature; it is love, therefore, that must return your hearts again to God; for as St. Augustine says, nothing renders a *repentance true and certain but the hatred of sin and the love of God*. Such, my brethren, are the essential ingredients of that repentance which is necessary for the blotting out of sin. These happy dispositions are obtained by humble prayer, and by attentively considering the baseness and deformity of sin, the hatred which God bears it, the eternal flames prepared for it in the world to come, and all that Jesus Christ has suffered for the expiation of it. When, therefore, you have reflected seriously on these affecting truths,

and duly considered the excess of your ingratitude to your compassionate Redeemer, who has poured out for your sake all the blood of his veins, and who still invites you to return to the arms of his mercy; when, in fine, your heart is gradually softened by these pious considerations, and melted into sorrow for having offended so good a God, and renewed the passion of his beloved Son Jesus, you may confidently hope that he will not despise your contrite and humbled heart. But you must also practise penitential works to expiate your past crimes, as I promised to shew you in the second point.

There is a difference between the remission of sins which we obtain by the baptism of water, and that which we obtain by the baptism of penance; the first is acquired easily and at a small expence, whereas the second costs us great labours and many tears, and is to be purchased by the practise of penitential works. There is still another difference; in the sacrament of baptism our crimes are forgiven both as to the guilt and the punishment, but in the sacrament of penance God treats us not with the same liberality and indulgence; he separates the pardon of sin from the pardon of the punishment; he remits the guilt and the eternal torments of hell, which we deserve to suffer for transgressing his sacred laws, but he still reserves to himself a right to inflict on us a temporal punishment, if we ourselves are not solicitous to prevent the rigour of his justice, by a penance proportioned to the number and heinousness of our crimes. This difference is grounded on God's justice, which, as the Council of Trent observes, Sess. 14. requires a difference in the manner of receiving those into mercy who, out of ignorance sinned before baptism, and those who, after having been redeemed out of the bondage of sin by baptism, relapse knowingly into sin, because by thus replunging into actual sin after being washed and purified in the blood of Jesus Christ, by defiling the white robe of their baptismal innocence, by stripping themselves wilfully of sanctifying grace, and throwing off the sweet yoke of their blessed Redeemer, they are guilty of a blacker ingratitude, their crimes are considerably greater, their guilt is remarkably aggravated, and consequently they deserve a far greater punishment by way of some atonement to the justice of God. Hence it follows, my brethren, that though you may have a true and sincere sorrow of heart for the crimes you have committed since your baptism, and though you may have obtained the pardon and remission of them, through the merits of Jesus Christ applied to you in the sacrament of penance, you still lie under a strict obligation to satisfy the divine justice by the laborious exercises of penance and mortification.

If we turn over the books of the old and new Testament, we shall find almost in every page some important truth relative to this obligation. The first word which the Almighty spoke to Adam was, to impose on him a heavy penance, should

he be so unfortunate as to violate the orders of Heaven ; and Adam no sooner transgressed than he was condemned to rigorous hardships, which lasted the whole course of his life. If the Prophets of the old Law opened their mouths, it was but to engage a sinful people to return to God by the austerities of a penitential life. John the Baptist, that divine Precursor destined to prepare the way for him who came to take away the sins of the world, begun his mission with these words, *Do the worthy fruits of penance* ; and Jesus Christ himself spoke in the same language, when he first laid himself out for the conversion of sinners ; *unless you do penance you'll all perish*. No truth is established on a more solid foundation, no truth more frequently inculcated in the writings of the holy Fathers. The faithful of the primitive ages were so fully convinced hereof, that one single mortal sin after baptism was then punishable with a rigorous penance, and a weekly fast of three days on bread and water, and that for the space of three, seven, ten, and sometimes fifteen years. This spirit of penance continued for a long time in the Church, as appears from the penitential canons which were in force for several centuries after the establishment of the Christian religion ; and from the rigorous austerities of the Pauls, the Antonies, the Hilarions, the Pachomius's, and numberless other holy anchorets, who deprived themselves of all the pleasures and comforts of this world, and pined away their days in penitential tears and regrets, in solitude and retirement, in the midst of deserts and amidst rocks, serpents, and wild beasts. O happy days of Christianity, too soon expired, will ye never more revisit the earth ? Shall we never again behold this spirit of penance revived, which to the end of time will reflect honour on religion, and confound the delicate penitents and half converts of this degenerate age, who seem to be startled at the very name of penance and mortification ? O what an affecting scene was it to behold then persons of each sex, from the highest to the lowest rank and station, place themselves in the classes of penitents, covered with sackcloth, their hair disheveled, their heads covered with ashes, prostrate with humility without the gates of the Church, in imitation of the lepers in the old Law, who remained withoutside the camp of Israel till the time of their purification was expired. In this humble posture, their eyes fixed on the earth, and all bathed in tears, they struck their breasts, like the publican in the Gospel, and ceased not to send up their sighs to Heaven, and cry out for mercy and pardon of the sins by which they had the misfortune to sully the white robe of their baptismal sanctity. O how will their example confound us at the last day, my brethren, if we neglect the practice of penitential works ? Can we pretend that our lives are more regular than the lives of the primitive Christians were ? Is not the justice of God still unchangeably the same ? Are works of penance and mortification less necessary in this depraved

age than in the purest ages of the Church? Alas! we are persuaded that we have many ways offended our God, and that if our sins are not remitted we shall be lost for all eternity. In the interim, we know not if our Sovereign Judge be yet appeased or reconciled to us or not; we know not whether we *be worthy of love or hatred*, as the Apostle says; we are uncertain of the efficacy of our past repentance, and consequently we are uncertain whether we be in the state of grace or in the state of damnation. Should not these reflections frequently alarm us? Should they not excite us to bewail our past sins in the bitterness of our souls, and do penance for them all the days of our life? Nay, though even an Angel from Heaven should assure us of our having obtained the happy remission of our sins, this should not hinder us from doing penance as long as we live. King David was assured by the Prophet Nathan, on the part of God, that he was forgiven; nevertheless he did not cease to mingle his bread with ashes and to water his couch with tears. Night and day the thought of his past sins drew streams from his eyes, sighs from his heart, and made him cry out to the Lord *to wash him still more from his iniquity, and to cleanse him from his former sins*. In like manner, Mary Magdalen never ceased bewailing her former irregularities, though she had the comfort to hear the sentence of her absolution pronounced by Christ himself in person. Not content with having lamented her sins at the feet of her Jesus, she passed almost the rest of her days in sighing and weeping in a desert; she condemned her eyes to perpetual tears; she made of her body a victim of mortification, and her penance only ceased and ended with her last breath. The same was the disposition of Peter the Apostle. After having denied his Lord and Master he never discontinued his repentance, but wept so often, and so constantly, that his eyes seemed to be two continual fountains of tears. Those examples, my brethren, should inspire you with a firm resolution to bring forth the fruits that are worthy of penance, how bitter soever and disagreeable they may appear to corrupt nature. Penance is the sole plank of safety you have left, after the shipwreck of your baptismal innocence; it is the only means to effect a reconciliation with the offended Deity; it is the only gate by which you can expect to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Remember, that if you depart this life, even in the state of penance but without having discharged the full amount of the debt you owe the Divine Justice, or without having made sufficient reparation for the injury you have committed against the Sovereign Majesty of God, you must expect to be sentenced to a prison, from which you will not be released until you, as the Gospel speaks, *shall have paid the last farthing*, that is, according to the explanation of St. Jerom, until you shall have fully satisfied and atoned for the least venial sin you have been guilty of. You must either do penance here, says St. Augustine, or burn in flames hereafter, in proportion to the punishment due to your sins. *Aut pœnitendum aut ardendum.*

O let me, then, entreat you to prevent the rigour of divine justice in the next life, by embracing voluntary exercises of penance in this life. Let me exhort you to redeem your sins with alms-deeds to the poor, as Daniel said to Nabuchodnosor, and to make up by the interior spirit of penance and mortification what your bodily infirmities, perhaps, may not allow you outwardly to perform. Bear the hardships, sufferings and afflictions of life, with which you are visited, with patience, humility and resignation, as coming from the hand of God, and designed for the benefit of your souls. In fine, endeavour to expiate your past offences by frequent and fervent acts of contrition, and do all the good works in your power whilst the light of grace and mercy shines, and before the fatal night of death overtakes you. O almighty and eternal God, grant us all the grace of true compunction, that we may bewail our sins in the bitterness of our souls, and make such atonement for them to thy justice as our weakness is capable of. We acknowledge the tenderness of thy mercy in having spared us hitherto, and given us time to repent, whilst thousands less criminal have suddenly died in their sins, and now lie burning in the flames of hell. O may thy goodness be for ever blessed and praised! By the same mercy we beseech thee to grant us the great gift of final perseverance, that we may be of the happy number of those blessed souls who, in concert with the angelic choirs, are to sing thy immortal praises in the kingdom of Heaven for a never-ending eternity. This is the happiness which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen,*

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY,

On the Good Use of Time.

Quid statis hic tota die otiosi?—S. Mat. c. xx. v. 6.

Why stand ye here all the day idle?—S. Mat. c. xx. v. 6.

ON this day the Church lays aside the Alleluias and Canticles of Joy which she made use of in the Divine Service since the Feast of our Saviour's Nativity, and puts on the Penitential Dress, in order to remind her children that the season of public penance and humiliation is now approaching, and that we ought to prepare for it in a religious manner, if we expect to be reconciled to the Lord and to be delivered from the

captivity of our sins; hence this Sunday is called *Septuagesime*, that is, the Seventieth, not only because it is about the seventieth day before Easter, but also because the captivity of sin, from which Christ came to deliver us, about this holy time, was prefigured by the captivity of Babylon, that lasted seventy years. The Gospel appointed by the Church for this Sunday contains, in the opinion of Origen, one of the principal parables in the Scripture, that is, the parable of the Father of a Family, who, having hired workmen at the first, third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours, to labour in his vineyard, reproved such as he found idling their time, and when the evening was come requited all the labourers with the same salary, yet in proportion to the work they had done, according to the rules of distributive justice. Thus it is that every one is to be rewarded according to his works, at the night of death and on the day of judgment; those who shall be then found to have served God for a short time with great fervour and devotion, will receive an equal recompence with those who have laboured indeed a longer time, but not with an equal fervency and ardour. Those who have been called at the last hour, or in an advanced age, and have done as much work as those who have been called at the first hour, or in their youth, shall be entitled to the same reward; the last shall be first, and the first shall be last, as the Gospel says, for many are called but few are chosen. The Jews, who were called first to the light of faith, and who have borne the burden of the old Law, shall be postponed to the Gentiles, who were called at the eleventh hour. In short, every one shall then reap what he has sown, as the Apostle speaks, Gal. yi. *He that soweth sparingly, sparingly also shall he reap, and he that soweth in blessings, of blessings also shall he reap*, 2 Cor. ix. Many will then, to their great confusion, find themselves poor and void of merits, who have it now in their power to manage their time to the advantage of their souls, and to enrich themselves by making daily advances in virtue. On the great day of reckoning, when time shall be for them no more, and when they shall be called to a strict account for every hour they have mispent, or thrown away in idleness, in frivolous amusements, empty projects, and delusive pleasures, they shall learn, to their unutterable sorrow, how offensive to God an idle, indolent life is, and what immense treasures are lost by it. To convince you hereof, my brethren, and to excite you to make good use of your time, I will endeavour to shew ye, that as nothing is more pernicious, or more productive of great evils than idleness, so, on the contrary, nothing is more precious or more valuable than time well employed and filled up. In short, the necessity and utility of sanctifying our time, and employing it in a manner worthy of the divine acceptance, shall be the entire subject of the following discourse. Let us first implore the aid of Heaven,

through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

It is a false notion of the luxurious and wealthy to imagine, that labour and toil were destined only for the poor and miserable, since the punishment incurred by the disobedience of our first parents is general and hereditary to all their posterity. The Almighty God has enjoined labour on mankind as a common penance due to sin, and we are all liable to the same sentence of gaining our bread with the sweat of our brow; no one is exempted from this general law; the rich as well as the poor are indispensably bound to shun idleness, and to employ with fidelity the time that God bestows them to work their salvation, by opposing vigilance to sloth, and virtue to vice; they are to apply themselves to some labour either of body or of spirit, or some serious occupation conformable to the respective states and conditions to which Divine Providence has called them. It is said to have been a rule among the Jews, that all their children were to learn some trade with their studies, were it but to avoid idleness, and to exercise the body as well as the mind in something serious, which made one of their Rabbies say, that a parent who neglects this duty is as criminal as if he taught his son to steal. St. Thomas of Aquin says, we are all commanded to labour according to our various functions and engagements in life, and in every thing we do we are to have always in view the honour and glory of our Creator, and the sanctification of our souls; for it is beyond all dispute, that God has created us for no other end but to love and serve him in this world, in order to see and enjoy him in the next; consequently, our time must be employed in serving him, and in promoting his honour and glory. He has a strict right to all our thoughts, words and actions, and as it is in him we live, move and subsist, we ought to make him the constant object of all our desires, the centre of all our affections, the beginning of all our enterprizes, and the end of all our pursuits. This is our duty in quality of sinners, and in quality of Christians and servants of God. It is not enough for us to refrain from evil, but we must likewise devote our time to the practice of good works, and lead an active and laborious life according to our different conditions. We must shun idleness, which is the root and spring of numberless crimes, and the cause of much mischief, as the Holy Ghost speaks, Eccles. xxxiii. It is a stream that undermines the foundation of every virtue; it is a rust of the mind, that gives a tincture of its nature to every action of a man's life, and a distaste for every thing that is good and praiseworthy. It is an inlet and incentive to every vice, and, as St. Augustine remarks, it opens a gap for Satan to enter into the purest souls, and insinuate the vilest temptations and allurements to sin. The Scripture affords us a striking instance hereof in the holy King David, who, as long as he exercised himself in military

affairs was free from the assaults of lust, but, as soon as he gave himself up to idleness at home, he became a victim to his passions, and fell into the abominable sins of adultery and murder. In like manner, whilst Solomon was occupied in building the temple, he was not overcome by lechery, but when he was idle he lay open to all the attacks of the devil, and fell into the most shameful disorders. Idleness also led the Sodomites into all their detestable excesses, as the Prophet Ezechiel informs us, c. xvi. and no wonder, for as land that is not cultivated produces weeds and briars in abundance, and as stagnating water, which has no course or motion, putrifies and engenders a number of nauseous insects, so, in like manner, according to St. Bernard, an idle, inactive, indolent life, is productive of nothing but sin and corruption. It is for this reason that St. Jerom gives the following advice to all Christians: Be always occupied at some work or other, that the devil may find you always busy; for he is not easily overcome by the devil who is always employed.

The anchorets of Egypt, and the solitaries in the deserts of Thebais, were so sensible hereof, that all the leisure hours they had to spare from prayer and contemplation, they employed in doing some manual works, as the aforesaid holy Doctor informs us, with the sole view of shunning idleness, and of being preserved from the evil suggestions of the enemy by the exterior labour of their hands. They knew that time is too precious to waste a single hour of it in idleness, and that corporal labour and regular employment are capable of being sanctified and made subservient to the soul's eternal salvation. They considered an active and laborious life as both medicinal and satisfactory; *medicinal*, because it is a preservative against vice, and *satisfactory*, because it is a powerful means to expiate sin, when it is embraced in the spirit of humility and penance, and performed in compliance with the will of God. O that the Christians of our days were deeply penetrated with the like sentiments, and took equal care to apply to honest industry and useful labour! Were it not for the destructive vice of idleness, to which vast numbers of people of all descriptions are unhappily addicted, we should not behold so many fatal examples of justice going to the common place of execution, nor so many mobs and riots upon all occasions, nor so many drunkards and libertines rambling from street to street, destroying trade, impoverishing their families, and blaspheming the sacred name of their Creator; the poor would be better supported than the play-house, the church of God would be more frequented than balls, assemblies and public shews, and charity and industry would take place of wantonness and prodigality; so many precious hours would not be lavished in sinful conversation, in gambling, drinking, detraction, cursing, swearing and reading pernicious books.

The Gospel gives us to understand that we are to be ac-

countable on the day of judgment for every idle word we speak, and consequently for every idle hour we mispend and prodigally throw away ; O what a rigorous account then will be demanded of those who not only spend their time in idleness, but abuse it to a still more criminal purpose, devoting so many hours, days and nights, to the perpetration of the most shameful excesses and the most scandalous works of darkness ? Have they not every reason to apprehend that the sovereign judge will pronounce a most dreadful sentence against them, since the workmen mentioned in this day's Gospel were condemned merely for standing idle and loitering away their time in doing nothing ? We read in chap. xxv. of St. Matthew, that the slothful and unprofitable servant was sentenced to be cast into exterior darkness, amidst weeping and gnashing of teeth ; yet the scripture does not charge him with being either a drunkard, a debauchee, or a libertine ; neither is he accused of having embezzled his master's substance ; all the fault laid to his charge is, that he was indolent and slothful, and that he buried his talent in the ground instead of improving and turning it to some advantage. This plainly shews how offensive to God an idle, careless and unactive life is, and how necessary it is to improve the time which God is pleased to lend us during our sojourn here on earth, to his greater honour and glory, and to the benefit of our souls. We are not to imagine that it is enough for us to shun evil ; we must comply with the whole precept by also doing good, *shun evil, and do good*, says the royal prophet, Ps. xxxvi. v. 27.

And really my brethren, if to make proper use of our time no more was required than merely to shun evil, and be guilty of no flagrant or palpable crimes, there are thousands of Pagans who might be considered to acquit themselves of this duty, as there are thousands among them free from similar gross vices, but equally strangers to the shining virtues that are prescribed by the Christian religion. The Lord in his great mercy has vouchsafed to call us to a more exalted degree of perfection ; he has made us his children and promised us an eternal reward, not for passing our days in ease and indolence, but for serving him with fervor and zeal ; every hour of our life is a talent, that he entrusts to us for negotiating the important affair of our salvation, and for gaining an happy eternity hereafter. If worldlings therefore deem it an unpardonable fault in a man of business to lose his time, make no use of his talents, and neglect wilfully a favourable opportunity of gaining a very considerable temporal advantage, how blameable must a Christian be, who having it in his power to lay up treasures for eternity every hour, neglects so many favourable opportunities of enriching his soul, and trifles away his precious time in sloth and idleness, as if it were of no value ? The great lesson of Christianity is to consecrate every moment of our time to God, by employing it in a manner worthy of his

divine acceptance; and to excite us to the performance of this duty, the Scripture exposes to our view the most pressing motives, by teaching us that time only appertains to God, that it is short and uncertain, that the time that is once lost never returns, never can be recalled, is lost for eternity; that it is granted to us by the mercy of God to be so disposed and sanctified as to conduct us one day to everlasting glory; that time is not so much to be computed by the number of years of which it is composed, as by the benefit and good use that is made of it; that we ought to endeavour to redeem the mispent time by applying ourselves with greater fervour and assiduity to the practice of good works, before the dark and fatal night of death overtakes us; in fine, that all the time which is not well employed is idle time, time thrown away, and as the loss is irreparable so it can never be sufficiently regretted. All our labours, toils and fatigues are vain and useless, if they were not referred to the end of our creation, and directed to God's honour and glory; they resemble the toils of a spider, which exhausts its substance in weaving a cobweb for catching flies and gathering dust, *telas araneæ texuerunt*, Isai. c. lix. v. 5. Unless we labour for Heaven, all the actions of our life are but a work founded on sand, which will turn to no lasting account; we shall be deemed at the last day no better than useless and unprofitable servants, who have neglected their master's business and loitered away their time at trifles. It is not the number of years we have lived, but the number of good works we shall have done, that will be then regarded. This is the rule by which our days are measured and our age is reckoned in the book of life; this is the way to arrive at an honourable and respectable old age in a short time, for as the Holy Ghost teaches us in the book of Wisdom, c. iv. 4. venerable old age is not to be computed by the number of years that a man lives here on the earth, but by the number of merits he amasses, and the number of good works he performs in his life time. For this reason a spotless and virtuous life, though of no long duration, is called in the Scripture a long life, and the just man, who in a short time attains to a state of perfection, is said to fill up much age in a short space of time. It is for this reason also that Saul king of Juda is called a boy, though he was a man of an hundred years old, because as he had led a disorderly life for so many years, he was deemed to have nothing of old age but the wrinkles and infirmities; all the time he mispent in vice is passed over in holy Writ and look upon as lost, forgotten and effaced, as if it never had existed. A profane historian would say that this unhappy king had reigned forty years over Juda, because in reckoning the years by the course of the sun, he is found to have sat so long on the throne of Juda; but the Holy Ghost goes by another rule, which is that of virtue, and only reckons the reign of Saul to have

lasted two years, because he only reigned two years as he ought to have reigned.

If, my brethren, we proceed according to this rule, what a considerable part of our natural life shall we find retrenched and lopped off as being productive of no good fruits conducive to life everlasting? Several among us are come to the eleventh hour of the day, that is to an advanced age; they are drawing very near to the end of their career, and yet what a small portion of their time have they consecrated to God's service, and to their own sanctification? Two thirds of their life should be employed in doing penance for their sins, and yet the greater part of their time has been spent in committing new faults, and in treasuring up more anger for themselves against the bitter day of wrath. On looking back and taking a serious view of their past conduct, they will discover, perhaps to their great humiliation and confusion, that they have sacrificed the best of their days and the flower of their life to pride and vanity, to idle visits, trifling amusements, profane diversions, and the pursuits of such unlawful pleasures as are the source of never ending miseries; without having the consolation of ever having served the Lord their God with fidelity one single day, they will find that they have, since the first use of reason, squandered away many hundreds, nay, many thousands of days in gratifying their passions; they will discover, that they have frequently abused and profaned the most solemn festivals, and converted holy days of salvation into days of rioting and gambling, luxury and debauchery. In fine, they will see that they have laboured much for the world, gained nothing for Heaven, made no provision for eternity, and that, though they have lost some millions of hours at trifles, they have not bestowed as many days or hours on the main chance as they have lived years; nay, that one hour well filled up and employed, would be worth more than a whole year, or an entire age, spent in the manner they have spent their time. O what an afflicting reflection will this be to a Christian at his dying hour, when, standing upon the verge of eternity he looks back and considers the ill use he has made of his time? Few accuse themselves now of this neglect, or are truly sensible of the greatness of their loss; but then we shall be convinced how valuable time is, and what treasures are lost by idleness. We shall then wish to recal one of those hours that are now so little regarded, but *time will then be no more*, says St. John. We shall then acknowledge, that all the goods, honours and riches of the world, are not worth one single hour, and of course, that a Christian suffers a greater loss by every hour he mispends, than if he had lost all the kingdoms and treasures of the earth; for every hour he loses is a talent misapplied, it is an opportunity of merit neglected, it is an eternity lost, it is a grace slighted whereby everlasting riches might be amassed, and immense treasures stored up for an happy eternity. This

made St. Bernard say, that though nothing seems to be less valued or esteemed by the generality of mankind than time, yet nothing is more precious or more estimable, since there is not a day nor an hour of our life but we might purchase an infinite treasure, and entitle ourselves to an increase of God's grace here, and an immortal Crown of glory hereafter. There is not one of our actions but might become an act of virtue, by being duly referred to the honour and glory of our Creator; not one thought, word or deed, but might be made an agreeable sacrifice; not a sigh of our hearts, but might be rendered an act of charity meritorious of life everlasting. What the damned souls never will be able to do for all eternity by their weeping, regrets and torments, we may do every moment by a devout act of contrition; nay, we can do every day by a fervent act of faith, hope and charity, what the blessed souls in Heaven cannot do in the space of a thousand years, by the purest acts of the love of God; for as long as we are here on earth, and whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, we have it in our power to merit every hour a new degree of God's grace, and with the aid of divine grace, we may not only appease God's anger and obtain the pardon of our sins, but also grow rich in virtue, and merit a new degree of glory. By managing our time well, and sanctifying it by the practice of good works, we may merit the kingdom of Heaven, and the possession of God himself for ever and ever; but the time of merit is over for the blessed souls in Heaven, as well as for the damned in hell; neither the one nor the other are any longer in the way of meriting; the night of death, after which no one can work, has overtaken them both, and put it out of the power of the former to merit any new degree of grace or glory, and out of the power of the latter to merit the least abatement in their pains. It is too late for them to think of working now. The reprobate, to their inexpressible grief, would not work whilst they had the daylight before them and whilst they had a favourable opportunity; were they now masters of ten thousand worlds, there is not a reprobate in hell but would joyfully sacrifice them all for one hour to repent, in case they were once more under a possibility of being saved thereby.

Let me conjure you then, my brethren, to grow wise at their expence, and to be better economists of your time for the future. How precious will a life well employed and sanctified be in the sight of God, and what a consolation will it be to yourselves at your dying moments? Let me entreat you with Apostolic words *to do good while you have time*, Gal. c. iv. v. 10. There is not an hour but is liberally bestowed on you to be improved to your advantage; *walk, therefore, whilst you have light*, says Jesus Christ, Jn. xii. Advance in virtue, and make a daily progress in the way of perfection, that you may redeem and recover, in the best manner you are able, the time you have lost, and of which you have hitherto been so lavish and

have made so little account. Imitate those travellers who, after tarrying awhile on the road, hasten with greater speed when they find it growing late, and endeavour to make good their journey before the darkness of the night overtakes them. O merciful and compassionate Jesus, who didst vouchsafe to weep over Jerusalem because it neglected the time of its visitation and the day of salvation that was offered to it, preserve us for the future from the like insensibility. Pardon, we beseech thee, our past neglects, and grant that we may henceforth make the proper use of our time whilst we are in the way of merit. - If hitherto we have had the misfortune to spend the flower of our life and the best of our days in the service of the world, and in the pursuit of its deceitful allurements, we are at length become sensible of our folly, and repent that we have begun so late to know and love thee, O Beauty, ever antient and ever new. Give us grace to serve thee the short remainder of our life, with a new zeal and fervour, and to satisfy for the long arrears of so many years of love and service as are already due to thee. Make us sensible that a short satisfaction in vice is punished with the eternal torments of hell, and that a short labour in the practice of virtue is rewarded with the never-ending joys and glory of Heaven. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

On the Word of God.

Semen est Verbum Dei.—St. Luc. c. viii. v. 11.

The Seed is the Word of God.—St. Luke, c. viii. v. 11.

THE Gospel distinguishes four different classes of people who hear the Word of God. One class consists of relapsing sinners, from whose hearts the devil immediately snatches this good seed, lest by giving it time to take deep root, it might produce in them the worthy fruits of repentance. Another class consists of obdurate and hardened sinners, on whose hearts the Word of God makes no lasting impression, but like unto a good seed that falls upon a rock, it decays and withers away for want of moisture. A third class consists of those who hear the Word of God with pleasure, but instead of reaping any considerable benefit from it, suffer it to be stifled and choked by the thorns and briars of their sinful affections, before it has time to grow up to its full maturity. A fourth class consists of those who hear the Word of God with the proper dispositions, and carefully remove every obstacle that might

prevent it from fructifying in their souls; in them the Word of God yields fruit in abundance, like unto a good seed that is sown in a good soil, and that is copiously watered with the dew of Heaven and kindly nourished in the bowels of the earth. To be convinced hereof, we need but consider the wonderful effects, and the amazing change that the Word of God wrought in a short time over the known world, at the very first dawn of Christianity. No sooner was it announced by a few illiterate fishermen but it wrought numberless conversions, and produced thousands of glorious Martyrs and illustrious Saints, of all states and conditions; it triumphed over the wisdom of philosophers, confounded the eloquence of orators, and subdued kingdoms and empires to the sweet yoke of the Gospel. It manifested the blind errors of Paganism, opened the eyes of the Gentiles, and persuaded them to demolish the temples of their idols, to pull down their altars, to abolish their impious sacrifices, to renounce their favourite superstitions, and to adore a crucified Jesus instead of a thundering Jupiter, a Mars or a Venus. Is it not surprising, cries out St. John Chrysostom, that the Word of God does not continue to work the same conversions in our days, and to produce the same happy fruits which it formerly produced in the very bosom of idolatry? It never was preached more frequently than it is at present, and yet in appearance it never met with less success, never was more barren, never brought in a smaller harvest of souls to the Lord! To investigate the unhappy causes of this deplorable sterility of the Word of God, and to point out proper remedies for removing and preventing so dreadful an evil, is the design of the following discourse. In the first place I will shew you, that the present barrenness of the Word of God is not owing to the Word itself, but to certain defects and indispositions on our part which hinder it from fructifying. The dispositions necessarily required on our part to render the Word of God productive of the most salutary effects, shall be the subject of the second point. Come first, we beseech thee, O Divine Spirit, descend into our souls, and preach to the hearts of my hearers what I am going to sound in their ears. That we may the more readily obtain this gracious favour from the Giver of all good gifts, let us devoutly implore the intercession of the ever-blessed Virgin, greeting her with the Angel, and saying, *Ave Maria*.

Our blessed Saviour, in the gospel of this day, compares the Word of God to a good seed, and gives us to understand, that three parts out of four of this good seed decay, perish, and are lost. One part only of it yields any fruit, although of its own nature it always has a most wonderful virtue and efficacy, and is now as powerful an incentive to virtue, and as effectual a preservative against the corruption of sin, as it was in the days of the Apostles; it is still as fruitful and productive in itself, as it was at the first establishment of

the Christian religion, when it humbled the pride of Cæsars, conquered the impiety of tyrants, and reformed the face of the universe with a success that struck the whole world with wonder and amaze. It is the self-same gospel we preach to you, in the present age, that St. Peter preached to the Jews upwards of seventeen hundred years ago, when, at his two first sermons, he converted eight thousand souls to the Lord. It is the self-same one, true, saving faith, we teach you, and the very same heavenly doctrine we announce to you, that St. Paul and the other disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ preached and announced, when, as the Scripture informs us, the Holy Ghost descended visibly on the faithful who were assembled together to hear the Word of God; they preached no other word, they announced no other doctrine, when they planted the Standard of the Cross in the very capital of the Roman empire, and extended their spiritual conquests beyond its remotest boundaries, than what we now-a-days preach and announce to you from our altars and pulpits; for the Holy Catholic Church, guided always by the Spirit of truth, has, in all ages since her infancy, taken particular care to preserve the Word of God in its primitive purity, and to hand it down from generation to generation, undefiled and uncorrupted, as she received it originally from Christ and his Apostles, without ever allowing the least deviation or the least change, even in a single iota, in her doctrine of faith and morals. Whence comes it, then, that the apostolic preachers of former ages converted so many thousands by their sermons, and that the modern preachers make so few converts, gain over so small a number of souls, and see their labours crowned with so little success? The Word of God has undergone no change or alteration in itself, as I have observed; why then does it not yield the same good fruits in our days that it heretofore did? It is plain that this sterility, so much to be lamented, cannot be attributed to the Word of God itself, so that it must be owing to some other cause; it must be owing to the preachers, or to the hearers, or, perhaps, to both the one and the other. The learned Bellarmin complains loudly of those preachers, who preach *themselves* and not Jesus Christ; they are not actuated, says he, with that fervour, that unction, that zeal, which animated the preachers of former ages, who had no other aim, no other intention, but to advance the divine honour and the salvation of souls. Their sermons, in general, are not doctrinal, instructive, pathetic, nor addressed to the heart, like those of the primitive Preachers, but seem rather to be discourses of parade, embellished with the flowers of rhetoric, dressed out with all the ornaments of human wisdom, and calculated more for pleasing the ears and exciting the admiration of the hearers by a pompous display of extraordinary talents, than for gaining their souls, converting their hearts, and exciting them to compunction for their sins. But if this be a shameful

abuse and profanation of the sacred ministry, and one of the causes of the present sterility of the divine word, it cannot be doubted but the evil dispositions of the hearers are another principal cause, that renders the heavenly seed unproductive and barren, and obstructs its inherent virtue and efficacy, much after the same manner that the operation of the very best remedies is frequently prevented by the indisposition of the patient, and the wonderful efficacy and salutary effects of the holy sacraments themselves are often obstructed by the evil dispositions with which they are received.

As therefore the object of preachers, and the end of sermons, should be to instruct the people in the tenets of faith, and in sound morals, and to excite and move them to goodness, the people, on their part, if they wish to be favoured with the unction of the divine Spirit, and to reap any solid advantage from the Word of God, should hear it with a pure intention and a sincere desire of being enlightened and edified, excited and moved to the practice of virtue, and to a faithful compliance with the moral and religious duties of their respective states. The great St. Augustine, in his book of confessions, blames himself for having been deficient in this respect before his conversion. Instead of being actuated by this Christian motive and good intention, he tells us, that he resorted to the sermons of St. Ambrose, on account of the eloquence of that holy Doctor, and not for the sake of his own spiritual improvement and edification, as he should have done; puffed up with pride, and big in his own conceit, he despised the humble style of the Scriptures, and preferred the elegant, flowery expression of Cicero to the noble and majestic simplicity of the Word of God. This is an error not uncommon in our days; although it must be acknowledged that truth never shines brighter, nor makes a deeper impression than in its own plain, native dress; yet it is not relished by numbers, who imagine themselves to be competent judges of a fine piece of oratory, unless it be decked out with all the pomp and glare of rhetorical flowers; they attend more to the arrangement of the periods, and to the beauty of the language, than to the substance, the sense and the doctrine. They come to a sermon, not for their spiritual improvement, but out of an idle curiosity, to criticise and pass a judgment on the brilliancy of the preacher's talents; they come, as they express it, to kill time, by being agreeably entertained with the graceful delivery and beautiful style of an elegant composition; they come, in short, not so much with a desire of having the Word of God impressed on their hearts and minds, as with a desire of hearing the word of man, nicely spinning out one or two speculative propositions with logical precision and great ingenuity. If the preacher inculcates the great practical duties of religion, or unfolds the terrifying truths of the Gospel, they are apt to hear him with a kind of indifference; if he speaks to them of the

incomprehensible joys of heaven, they hover, in the interim, with their thoughts on the world, to which their hearts and affections are strongly attached; if he expatiates on the horrid enormity of every mortal sin, on the indispensable obligation of doing penance, on the sad alternative of burning in flames of fire with merciless devils for an endless eternity in hell, they pay little attention or regard to what is said on the occasion; they imagine that matters are exaggerated; they do not bring the subject home to themselves; they think it more applicable to others, nay, they sometimes make a jest of it, like unto the unhappy people of Sodom and Gomorrhah, who laughed at the salutary advice and charitable remonstrances of Loth, and continued in their criminal practices, until they were consumed by the avenging flames that descended visibly upon them from the Heavens. To reject the word of God, to slight and neglect hearing it through contempt, or to refuse paying any attention to it, is to slight and reject with ingratitude one of the most powerful means that God in his great mercy has been pleased to provide for the conversion and sanctification of souls, and, consequently, it is an evil of so dangerous a tendency, that it is sufficient to provoke the Almighty, in his wrath, to withdraw from sinners the dew of Heaven, to take from them the dispensers of his divine Word, and to abandon them to their own reprobate sense, like those unhappy nations which are involved in a deplorable ignorance of the mysteries of faith, or, as the scripture phrase expresses it, *are seated in darkness, and in the shadow of death*. Christ our Lord ordered his disciples to quit such places and such people as would not pay attention to the doctrine they preached, and going out into the street to shake off the dust which had stuck to their feet, to denote thereby that they justly deserved to be rejected by God who rejected his word; he likewise pronounced a dreadful wo against the people of Corosaim and Bethsaida, who took little notice of the words of eternal life, which he had so often preached to them: *Wo to ye, inhabitants of Corosaim and Bethsaida, said he, if the same signs, which have been wrought among ye, had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes*. He also foretold the Jews, that the kingdom of God would be taken from them on the same account, and given to a people that would bring forth better fruit, and correspond more faithfully with the gracious favours of Heaven. In effect, my brethren, what stronger proof can there be of a depraved and corrupted heart than to slight, reject, and despise the word of God? It is a dangerous symptom, and a plain indication of a disordered stomach, to reject good corporal food, and a sign of sore eyes to hate and shun the light; the same light that revives and enlightens a sound eye, is offensive to a sore eye, says St. Augustine, and the same food which a healthy man relishes

and deems sweet and savoury, appears insipid and unpalatable to a sickly man. In like manner the word of God, which in itself is a lovely and reviving light to the children of God, and a delicious bread that nourishes the faith, whereby the just man lives, appears unsavoury, loathsome and disagreeable to the children of darkness; *they hate the light, and come not to the light, lest their works should be reprov'd*, says St. John, c. iii. v. 20. St. Paul also remarks that *carnal and sensual men have no taste or relish for the spiritual things that are of God; they do not receive the words of prudence, unless you speak to them concerning those things that their hearts are full of*, says the wise man, in the Book of Ecclesiasticus. Politics, theatrical performances, plays, comedies, novels and stories of gallantry, are their favourite pursuits and darling entertainments. They think nothing of throwing away three or four hours of their time at a party of pleasure, at a card table, in a tavern or in a play-house; but it is with difficulty they are prevailed on sometimes to spend a single hour or half hour in the whole week, at a sermon or exhortation on the Lord's day. No sooner do they forsake the paths of virtue, and suffer themselves to be blinded and enslaved by their tyrannical passions, but they lose all taste and relish for the heavenly manna of the Word of God, and even conceive a dislike and aversion to it, in imitation of the children of Israel in the desert. The Scripture relates, that as long as they remained faithful to the Lord their God, and walked in the way of his commandments, the manna continued to be to them a heavenly food, that contained every kind of delicious taste that could gratify their palates; but no sooner did they relent in their fervour, and forgot their duty to God, than the manna lost its delicious taste and relish, and they began to cry out that *their soul did loathe this very light food*, until at length they provoked the wrath of the Almighty to that degree, that vast numbers of them were destroyed by fiery serpents in the desert, Numb. c. xxi. v. 1. Their misfortune should be a warning to all Christians to beware of following their example, and drawing down on themselves the indignation of Heaven. But let us now proceed to the dispositions with which the Word of God is to be heard.

As it is a proof of a corrupted heart, and a mark of reprobation, to disregard, undervalue and reject the Word of God, according to this terrifying sentence pronounced by our Blessed Saviour against the Jews, John, c. viii. v. 4. *Ye hear not the words of God, because ye are not of God*; so on the contrary, to be fond of hearing the word, and to cherish it carefully in the heart, is considered to be a mark of predestination according to these words of Christ; *He that is of God, heareth the words of God*, John, c. viii. v. 47, and again, Jo. c. x. v. 27. *My sheep hear my voice*. If we look back towards the infancy of the church, we shall find that the primitive Christians were so fond of hearing the Word of God, that they frequently

suspended their worldly occupations, and hastened in great multitudes from all parts of Judea and Jerusalem in order to nourish their souls with this heavenly manna; their spiritual hunger and thirst after it was so pressing, that it made them forget their corporal wants and necessities, and flock with alacrity in thousands together, to mountains and deserts for the same pious purpose; they even assembled in prisons and subterraneous caverns, in order to hear the Word of God from the mouth of their Pastors and Spiritual Guides, which made St. Paul say, I am loaded with chains like a malefactor, but in the midst of my sufferings and afflictions I have the comfort to see that the Word of God is not bound or fettered; for my little flock, which I regard as my crown and my joy, takes care to assemble about me in the prison where I am confined, to hear the Word of God from my mouth. As long as this ardent desire to hear the Word of God continued, the spiritual kingdom of Christ was daily extended, the empire of Satan was gradually weakened, vice was detested, virtue was cherished, sinners were reclaimed, infidels were converted, religion flourished, and the faithful in general were inspired with an holy emulation to tend to the very summit of sanctity and perfection.

O, my brethren, if you were inflamed with the like ardent desire to hear the Word of God, there is no doubt but it would produce the like blessed fruits in our days. *Did you but know the gift of God*, as Christ formerly said to the Samaritan woman, to whom he vouchsafed to preach at the Well of Jacob, Jo. iv. Did you but seriously consider what a signal blessing and gracious favour the Lord bestows on you, in sending you a number of preachers to announce his Word, to point out to you the sure road of salvation, and to preserve you from the darkness of infidelity which overspreads three parts of the world, you would be more thankful to him for his mercies, more faithful in corresponding with his grace, more assiduous in frequenting sermons and exhortations. Several amongst us remember the time, when we would have gone with alacrity far and near to hear the Word of God, and would have been overjoyed to meet with one-tenth part of the many favourable opportunities we have at present to hear it; we remember the time, when the following words of the Prophet Jeremy might have been justly applied to, and really verified in us, *The little ones cried out for the bread of life, and there was no one to break it for them.* Glory be to God on high, the case is altered. The religion of our ancestors, planted in this island by St. Patrick upwards of thirteen hundred years ago, is no longer deemed incompatible with the allegiance of good subjects; the sunshine of toleration has at length succeeded the gloomy season of penal laws, and Divine Providence has supplied the Vineyard of Christ with numbers of active Labourers, who study both day and night to cultivate it, and to feed the flock with the food of sound doctrine. These are blessings which

you now enjoy in preference to thousands in other parts of the globe, and which will serve to render you the more accountable on the last day, unless you turn them to the advantage of your souls. Far, then, from suffering your zeal to slacken or your fervour to diminish, you should rather redouble it, and cheerfully embrace every favourable opportunity of hearing the Word of God as often as the duties of your respective states will permit. The pastors and preachers of the Church are bound, in conscience, to announce it to you; and on your part you are bound, in conscience, to hear it with docility and humility, as a voice from Heaven directed to each of you in particular. You are to hear it with a good intention of reducing it to practice, and regulating your conduct by it, since, as the Apostle says, *Not the hearers, but the doers and observers of God's Word are justified in his sight.* It is a spiritual bread, says St. Augustine, that must be chewed and digested, that is, you must ruminate and meditate upon it at your leisure, and carry it into execution. It is a seed that will not fructify, unless it be sown in a fit and suitable soil; every obstacle that would prevent its growth must be carefully removed; the briars and thorns of every inordinate affection must be weeded out, lest the good seed be choaked and suffocated before it comes to its full maturity. In short, the ground must be well prepared, the heart must be well disposed and purged for receiving it; it must be laid up in the mind, and deeply lodged and preserved in the bottom of the heart, lest the enemy should pick it up and snatch it away before it has time to take root. And since, as the Apostle speaks, 1 Cor. iii. *Neither he who plants, nor he who waters is any thing, but God, who gives the increase,* his sacred unction and heavenly benediction ought to be devoutly implored; without it the Preacher is only a sounding trumpet, though he should speak the language of men and of angels; his words will have no considerable effect, but will speedily vanish away from the mind; they will strike the ears, but not mollify the stony heart of the sinner, nor work the conversion of his soul. This made St. Augustine say, that the principal Preacher has his pulpit in Heaven. Those who are ordained, authorized and deputed by the Church, are his organs, *his Ministers and the Dispensers of his mysteries*; they are the *Ambassadors of Christ*, as St. Paul stiles them, 2 Cor. xx. In the discharge of the sacred functions of their ministry they act not from themselves, but by his authority; they speak to us in his name and on his part. He that hears them, hears him; he that despises them, despises him; and he that despises him, despises his heavenly Father who sent him, as he expressly assures us, St. Luke, c. x. They are the lawful heirs and successors of the Apostles, vested with the same authority and commission that Christ gave them to preach the Gospel, and teach all nations; for as he commissioned the Apostles *to go and teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever he had*

commanded them, Matt. xxviii. and as he promised at the same time to be with them all days, even unto the consummation of the world, in order to assist them continually in their functions of teaching and instructing, it is manifest that this commission was not confined to the persons of the Apostles, since they neither did, nor could continue to teach all nations in their own persons, nor were to continue upon earth to the end of the world; consequently, this commission was given by Christ to their office, that is, to them and to their successors in office, who shall continue to the end of the world, and complete the work of teaching all nations, which the Apostles began. These only are the Teachers and Preachers who have a right to announce the Word of God to you, and whose faith, the Scripture orders you to hear and follow, Heb. xiii. 7, 9. and Mat. xviii. 17. lest you be led astray by the various and strange doctrines of those new Gospellers and self-commissioned Preachers, who, like the false Prophets of the old Law, adulterate the Word of God, and presume to preach and dogmatize without any mission, authority or title whatever. How shall they preach, says St. Paul, Rom. x. unless they be sent?

Give us grace, O Divine Jesus, to hear thy Word with every proper disposition. Take from us, we beseech thee, that stony heart which has hitherto resisted thy grace and frustrated the desigus of thy mercy. Give us an heart of flesh, susceptible of the impressions of thy heavenly Spirit. Cultivate our barren souls, which are so apt to bring forth briars, thorns and noxious weeds, ingratitude without end, and sins without number. Water them with thy inspirations, and bedew them with thy graces, that thy sacred Word may produce in us an hundred-fold fruit, and may dispose us for partaking one day of that happiness which thou hast promised through the mouth of thy Evangelist, saying, *Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it*, St. Luke, c. xi. v. 28. And this, my brethren, is the blessing which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

On the Nature and Necessity of Divine Faith, &c.

Respice, Fides tua te salvum fecit.—S. Luc. c. xviii. v. 42.

Receive thy Sight; thy Faith has made thee sound.—S. Luke, c. xviii v. 42.

THESE words of comfort were spoken by the Saviour of the world to a poor blind man, who, sitting by the way-side on the road of Jericho, and learning from the crowd that

Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, cried out with a loud voice, *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.* So great was his confidence in Jesus, and so ardent his desire of being restored to his eye-sight, that he was not to be discouraged by the opposition he met with from the crowd; the more they checked him for his importunity, and the more they endeavoured to impose silence on him, the more he raised his voice and redoubled the fervour of his prayer to Jesus to have mercy on him, until at length his perseverance was crowned with success, and the bowels of infinite mercy were moved to compassion; for, as this day's Gospel informs us, Jesus stopped for a while on the road, and having ordered the poor blind man to be brought near, he said to him, *What wilt thou that I do for thee?* Whereupon he replied, *Lord, that I may receive my sight.* And Jesus said to him, *Receive thy sight; thy faith has made thee sound.* And accordingly he immediately received his sight, and began to follow his bountiful Benefactor, glorifying and praising God in conjunction with the multitude of people, who were eye-witnesses to this illustrious miracle.

Behold here, my brethren, a remarkable instance of the wonderful power and efficacy of a strong and lively faith. It is to it that our Blessed Redeemer attributes the miraculous cure of the aforesaid poor blind man; and the Gospel assures us that every thing becomes possible to it, every thing is granted to it; it is the foundation on which all Christian perfection is built, and the root from which every Christian virtue springs. *By it the just man lives, and without it it is impossible to please God,* as the Apostle says, Heb. c. xi. v. 6. It is the first step to our salvation; for, as the first step by which man fell from the happy state of his original innocence, was a proud affection of a more extensive knowledge than his all-wise Creator was pleased to allow him; so, in like manner, the first step we are to take in order to rise from sin and turn to God, is to pull down the idol of human pride and self-conceit, to subject our reason and senses to the Word of God, and to *captivate our understanding in obedience to Christ*, as the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. We must humbly acknowledge our own weakness and insufficiency, make a sacrifice of what is most dear to self-love, and correct the liberty of thinking and acting as we please, in order to pay due homage to God's infinite wisdom and veracity, by believing firmly all the sacred truths he has revealed, though we neither see them nor comprehend them. It is in humbling the pride of man in this manner, and in preferring the divine authority to any thing our own weak reason and senses can oppose to the contrary, that the merit of our faith consists. This is what renders it so acceptable to God; this is what preserves it free from all illusion, and sets it above all exception, in spite of all the specious arguments that human wit and learning are able to suggest. The sacred Scriptures point out to us only *one true faith*, as there is only

one true God, *one Spouse of Christ, one Sheepfold, one House of God, one true Church, to which the Lord daily adds all that are to be saved*, Acts, c. ii. v. 47. And since the many contradictory sects and religious societies, into which Christianity is at present unhappily divided and subdivided, cannot be all in possession of this one true saving faith, it is highly incumbent on us all to be well instructed in the nature of so necessary a means of salvation, and to know with certainty in what communion the true faith is preserved and professed in its primitive purity. This is the important subject which I will endeavour to elucidate in the following discourse, for your edification, and that, according to the advice of 1 St. Peter, iii. 15. *You may be always ready to give satisfaction to every one that asketh a reason of the hope which is in you.* In the first point I will lay before you the nature and necessity of the virtue of divine faith; and in the second I will shew you, that the Holy Catholic Church is in actual possession of this one true saving faith. Let us previously implore the light and assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, whom the Angel of the Lord greeted with the following words, *Ave Maria.*

Faith is a gift of God, according to these words of St. Paul, Ephes. ii. 8. *By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God; and since it is the will of God that all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth,* as St. Paul also says, 1 Tim. ii. 4. God does not refuse to bestow this gift on those who seek it in the sincerity of their hearts, and use their best endeavours to obtain it. If he does not grant it to many, it is either because they do not seek it with a sincere and upright heart, or because natural obstinacy, prejudice of education, worldly interest, human respect, temporal views, the fear of what the world will say and friends will think, or some considerations of this sort blind their understandings that they may not see the truth, and avert their wills from embracing it. Our Blessed Saviour assures us, Matt. xi. 25. *that his Heavenly Father hides the secrets of his divine wisdom from the wise and prudent, and reveals them to little ones.* Hence the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, c. xi. v. 1. calls divine faith *the substance of things to be hoped for, and the conviction of things that appear not.* The sacred truths it proposes to be believed do not appear to us clear and evident in themselves, but rather obscure and impenetrable; they are sublime mysteries that surpass the force of human understanding, and are so far above our comprehension, that if God had not been pleased to reveal them to mankind, it would be impossible for us by all our researches to come to the knowledge of them; neither reason, nor experience, nor study, could ever give us any just idea of them; for if the most subtile philosophers, by the light of their natural reason, the force of their close study, and the strength of their genius, never have

been yet able to account for several things that are common and obvious in nature, how could we expect to fathom the profound secrets of Heaven with the short line of human reason, or be able, by our natural strength, to discover the abstruse and supernatural mysteries which belong to another world, and are so far from falling under our reason or senses, so as to be investigated by them, that they appear sometimes to be contrary to our natural reason, and to contradict our senses? But when we are aided by divine revelation, and strengthened by the gift of divine faith, our understanding is elevated, and our mind is enabled to perceive light through clouds of darkness, and we acquire a stronger conviction and a fuller persuasion of the truth of the sacred revealed mysteries, than if we actually saw them with our eyes, because we do not depend for the truth of them upon any natural knowledge, nor upon the fallible evidence of our own senses, which often lead us astray, nor upon the testimony of men, who of themselves are liable to various errors and mistakes in the most ordinary things; but we rely upon the Word of God himself, who cannot deceive us as he is infinitely good, and who cannot be deceived as he is infinitely wise. His divine revelation joins to the obscurity of the mysteries which it proposes to be believed, an evidence that renders them credible beyond all doubt. God himself is our guarantee; our faith is built upon his sovereign truth, grounded immediately upon his infallible authority, and has his infinite wisdom for its support. This is what gives a certain conviction, a solid peace and comfort to all believers. Men of the meanest capacity are capable of believing, with the help of divine grace, as well as the most learned divine; they have equally the same motive for their belief, and may silence the most acute philosopher who would attempt to shake them in their faith by the reasonings of human wisdom, or by the dint of sophistical arguments. It must be acknowledged that nothing can be more just, nothing can be more agreeable to the dictates of right reason, than that we should believe what God has said and proposed to be believed; it is enough that he has revealed it; it is our duty to acquiesce and to submit our understanding and judgment, without holding any argument with him, or presuming to canvas the truth of his words. We are allowed, indeed, to make use of our reason and judgment to inform ourselves about the matter, whether it be revealed or not, but we are no longer to argue the case, when we once know that God has spoken; then, instead of searching and inquiring how far his heavenly truths are conformable to the principles of human reason, it is our business to follow the footsteps of Abraham, the father of the faithful, *who against hope believed in hope*, Rom. c. iv. v. 18. and as St. Peter exhorts us, 1 Ep. c. ii. to become by faith like rational babes, without guile or deceit, keeping our understanding in proper subjection to God's authority; for as our wills must be submissive and obedient in all things to his

holy Law, and as we must do even what is hard to be done, because he has commanded it, so in like manner our understandings are to submit humbly to all that God has revealed, and we are to believe even what is hard to be believed, because he has taught it. Moreover, as we ought to resist our inclinations whenever they solicit us to transgress the Law of God, so we ought likewise to resist all the distrustful suggestions of an incredulous temper, and to cast down all human reasonings, with every imagination that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, as the Apostle speaks, 2 Cor. x. A full, firm, and absolute assent must be given to all things revealed by God, whether we understand them or not, whether they be written or unwritten, since all the truths of divine faith stand upon the same testimony, and are equally grounded upon the authority of God, who is as infallible in the revelation of one mystery as he is in the revelation of another. To suppose his testimony and authority to be false in any one point, is to ruin it in all points, and to destroy the very foundation of all faith; it is to reduce divine faith to a mere human faith, belief, fancy and opinion, as St. Augustine formerly remarked to the unbelievers of his days, who made their own private judgment the rule of their belief. Ye, said this holy Doctor, who believe what ye please, and reject what ye do not comprehend, who admit some articles of faith and disbelieve other articles, ye believe yourselves and not the Gospel; ye who divide the faith have no divine faith at all, for divine faith is entire and indivisible. It comprehends the whole doctrine of Jesus Christ without exception, and requires us not only to believe in the divinity of his person, but likewise to believe, without hesitation, all his words and all that he has taught. Whoever discredits his authority in any one single article, or refuses to believe what he says in the Gospel, dishonours him in a most irreligious manner, and cannot truly be said to believe him to be God, because, by questioning his veracity, and discrediting his word, he impiously supposes him to be either ignorant of the truth, or to be guilty of telling a lie, *which it is impossible for God to do. He that believeth not the Son maketh him a liar, says St. John, because he believeth not the testimony which God hath given of his Son, 1 John, c. v. v. 10. and again, 2 John, v. 9. He that continueth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God; and St. Paul tells us, 2 Thess. c. i. That they who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction. There is no salvation in any other, says St. Peter, for there is no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved, Acts. iv. 12.*

His Gospel has been preached, and his faith has been propagated through the remotest parts of the known world by his Apostles, whom he commissioned to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, with a solemn promise, *that he that shall*

believe, and be baptized, shall be saved, but he that shall not believe shall be condemned, Mark, c. xvi. v. 16. The Apostles having obeyed his orders, and announced his doctrines to all people, whole nations were instructed in the principles of the true saving faith and baptized; and the Church, being thus established, has ever since stood its ground in spite of all the revolutions of nature, the policy of empires, and the deceitful projects of Satan. Yes, my brethren, thanks be to God, ye have shared in these advantages which the world derived from the zeal and labour of the Apostles. Ye have been baptized and made members of the Church of Jesus Christ; ye have embraced that divine faith which the primitive Christians embraced, and of which they were so tenacious that they suffered the most excruciating torments, and sacrificed their lives, rather than renounce or deny any one point of their religious creed. A glorious and happy succession of upwards of seventeen hundred years has transmitted the same faith which they professed to us, pure and unaltered; and an untainted and uninterrupted tradition will undoubtedly hand it also down to the end of time, because it is the doctrine of a God *whose words shall never pass away, though Heaven and earth should pass away*. But let us now examine by what means this faith, which was first revealed by Jesus Christ, and planted by the Apostles, has been preserved and conveyed down to us entire and uncorrupted, and by what rule and standard we may know to a certainty that we are in actual possession of it.

As the Divine Author and Founder of our faith requires of us a belief of mysteries above our comprehension, he was not willing to leave us trusting to the weakness of our own reason, exposed to the uncertainty of our own private judgment, and to the manifest danger of being misled by our own fallible opinion in the most important matters of our religious belief, but in his great mercy and goodness he has taken care to provide for our salvation after a more certain, a more easy and a more simple manner, and to give us a certain, universal, and plain rule of faith, adapted to all capacities. This rule of faith, which his divine wisdom has been pleased to appoint for us, is the testimony and authority of the Holy Catholic Church, which we profess in the Creed, and which is under the special protection of Heaven, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. From this Church, founded by Christ for the instruction of *all*, spread for that purpose through *all* nations, and continued through *all* ages, every one may easily learn what he is to believe and do in order to be saved. It is this rule that cements union in faith, and that prevents the dissensions and innovations that are observable among those who have no bond of union or fixed standard for their belief, and are therefore constantly divided among themselves, and splitting into a strange variety of new sects. By adhering to this rule all the members of the Catholic Church, though widely differing in language, in

manners, in customs, in humours, in climate, in government, and in temporal interests, every where believe the same religious truths, profess the same faith, teach the same doctrine, preach the same gospel, hold the same principles, receive the same sacraments, and concur in one and the same worship. The religion of their Church has never varied in points of divine faith, but has always been, is at present, and ever will be, uniformly the same in every age. The writings of Christians, in all preceding ages, and in all the different nations of the world, plainly shew that the faithful of this eighteenth century believe precisely what was believed in the seventeenth century, and that those of the seventeenth century believed what was believed in the sixteenth century, and those of the sixteenth century believed what was believed in the fifteenth century, and so up to the days of Christ and his Apostles. No new articles of faith were ever framed by the pastors of the Church; what they have taught in declaring any obscure or controverted point, was not their own private opinion, but precisely the self-same doctrine which they received from their predecessors in every preceding generation; for it is, and always has been, an invariable principle, inculcated first by the Apostles in their writings, and ever since strictly observed as a fence and barrier against all innovations, never to deviate one single iota from the faith, but to adhere firmly to the doctrine received from the preceding generation, and to deliver it carefully to the succeeding generation without addition or diminution. Hence we read in the New Testament so many dreadful menaces of perdition and destruction against unbelievers who presume to divide the faith of Jesus Christ, or attempt to change, adulterate, or corrupt any part of his doctrine, or to broach any novelty in matters appertaining to religion. St. Paul says, that though an Angel should descend from Heaven for such a purpose, he ought to be looked upon as anathema, or accursed. It was upon this principle that the Arians, Macedonians, Nestorians, Pelagians, and other ancient sectaries, who attempted to make innovations in the doctrine of faith, were immediately opposed, detected, proscribed, and cut off as rotten members from the great body of the faithful.

In all ages the pastors of the Church, who are the guardians and depositories of the truths of faith, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God, as the Apostle speaks, 1 Cor. iv. have *contended earnestly for the antient faith which was first delivered to the saints*, St. Jude, v. 3, and have been ever watchful to pluck up and root out the pernicious tares of error, whenever the enemy attempted to sow them over the good seed; and, as they took particular care to hand down from generation to generation the revealed truths, precisely as they had received them from their predecessors, it was impossible that any alteration or corruption should ever take place in the purity of a doctrine thus conveyed, and consequently it must have always

continued uniformly the same ; for if, for example, the pastors and their flocks of the second age received and believed nothing as revealed truths but what they had received as such from their predecessors of the apostolic age, it is manifest that the faith of the first and second age was perfectly the same ; and again, if those of the second age delivered the same truths entire and uncorrupted to those of the third age, then the faith of the third age must infallibly have been the same with that of the two preceding ages, and this must necessarily be the case with every succeeding age to the present, and will be so to the end of the world.

Millions of Christians, of this present age, living in the different kingdoms and nations of the earth, have seen, heard and conversed with millions of their predecessors, and cannot be ignorant of the faith that every generation of them, from the cradle to the most advanced old age, held and professed. They bear witness of what the great body of pastors taught by common consent, and what all the faithful spread all over the world, and including always about sixty or eighty generations at once, unanimously believed before them in the last age. The same last preceding age gave the like testimony of the age immediately preceding it, for the same reason ; so that, though the faithful of this present age have not seen Jesus Christ or his Apostles, yet they are unexceptionable witnesses of what was taught and believed in their days, because they are unexceptionable witnesses of what was taught and believed by the generation that immediately preceded them ; and this generation was in like manner an unexceptionable witness of the doctrine and practice which it learned from the generation before it, and so upwards to the very beginning of Christianity. This perpetual mixture and concatenation of so many ages and so many generations, interwoven the one with the other and twisted together, forms but one great body, or Church, spread all over the known world, yet still united in religion, and composed of all true believers, who bear one testimony for upwards of seventeen hundred years, that the faith we profess in the eighteenth century is the self-same that was professed by the primitive Christians. This plainly shews the *finger of God*, and his all-ruling providence to be visibly here, and is a convincing proof that his Church can never alter the faith. *The words which God once put into her mouth, shall never depart from her mouth*, as the Prophet Isaias speaks, c. lix.

We cannot then go astray in following so sure a guide ; in hearing her we hear and obey Jesus Christ, who commands us to obey his Church under pain of being deemed as heathens and publicans, Matt. xviii. 17. However, whilst we glory in the profession of the ancient faith of all preceding ages, and return thanks to the infinite goodness of God for the grace of our vocation to the true Church of Christ, in preference to so many others who are unhappily involved in the darkness of

infidelity, we should beware of flattering ourselves into a false security, or imagining that a mere speculative and abstractive faith will be sufficient to save us. No, my brethren, though our faith should be supposed strong enough to remove mountains, as St. Paul speaks, yet it will avail us but little to life everlasting, unless it be animated with charity, and accompanied with the practice of good works. *Faith without works is dead, as the body without the spirit is dead*, says St. James, c. ii. v. 26. A dead barren faith of this nature will rather serve on the last day as the rule of our condemnation, than contribute to save us, or to entitle us to the blessing which our Saviour insured to the poor blind man in this day's gospel, in the following words, *Fides tua te salvum fecit. Thy faith has saved thee*. The advantages and benefits of divine faith are indeed very signal and valuable in themselves; but to reap them, it is not only necessary to believe what Christ has revealed, but also to do what he has commanded. Our actions must agree with our belief, and our lives must correspond with our doctrine; we must live up to the dictates of our profession, practice its precepts, and honour it by the purity of our morals, this being the way to adore the Lord our God in spirit and truth. O merciful Jesus, grant us a lively and active faith, which worketh by charity, that we may partake of the happy fruits of thy redemption. Direct our steps by thy heavenly grace, that we may walk with circumspection and edification in the way of truth, and in the paths of virtue, during the course of our mortal life, and that we may one day arrive safely in those sacred mansions of bliss which thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants. And which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, *Amen*.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

On the Obligation of leading a Penitential Life, particularly in the Holy time of Lent.

Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.—2 Cor. c. vi. v. 2.

Behold now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.—
2 Cor. c. vi. v. 2.

THE Church, always solicitous for the salvation of her children, incessantly invites sinners to repentance, and admonishes them to return to the Lord their God in the sincerity of their hearts, that they may find mercy and grace through Jesus

Christ. In her Divine Office, which she recites during the ensuing holy time of Lent, she redoubles her zeal and solicitude for the conversion of all sinners, and exhorts them repeatedly in the following words of the Prophet Isaias : *Let the wicked man forsake his evil ways, and the unjust man his thoughts, and return to the Lord, and the Lord will have mercy on him, c. lv.* In the sacred ceremonies of this day she reminds us of our mortality, in the memorable words which the Almighty made use of when he pronounced sentence of death against our first parents after their fall from the happy state of innocence. Our heads are also marked with ashes at the same time, to give us to understand what is inevitably to be the end of us all, and to excite us to disengage our hearts from the love of the world, and to be always guarded against the irreparable consequences of an unprovided death. The example of our blessed Saviour fasting forty days and forty nights in the desert, is likewise laid before our eyes at the very beginning of this holy time, as an encouragement for us to imitate this divine model according to our ability, and in a manner that is suitable to our weakness.

Let us then, my brethren, enter into the spirit of the Church, and spend the forty days of Lent in a course of spiritual exercises and penitential works; let us endeavour to expiate the sins we have committed in the course of the year, and offer some slender reparation to the Divine Majesty for our manifold offences. *Let us seek the Lord while he may be found, says the Prophet Isaias, and call upon him while he is near, Isai. c. lv. v. 6.* Let us be converted to him in fasting, weeping, and mourning, says the prophet Joel. To induce ye the more effectually thereto, I will endeavour to shew ye that it is the indispensable duty of a Christian to lead a penitential life at all times, but particularly during the holy time and penitential season of Lent, because this is the most acceptable time in the whole year for doing penance. Behold the entire plan and subject of the following discourse. Let us first implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin. *Ave Maria.*

Nothing can be more clearly established, or more forcibly inculcated in the divine Scriptures, than the necessity of penance, whether we consider it as a sacrament or only as a virtue. The necessity of the sacrament of penance commenced in the new Law with the promulgation of the Gospel after our Saviour's resurrection, when he gave the keys of the kingdom of Heaven to his Apostles, and commissioned them and their lawful successors in the ministry, who were to govern the Church after their death, to absolve and forgive repenting sinners in his name, and by his authority, saying, in express terms, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose soever sins ye shall retain, they are retained.* And again, *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth,*

shall be bound in Heaven ; whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven. But the virtue of penance, with its principal act, which is contrition, has at all times been necessary for sinners, even under the old Law, in order to obtain the forgiveness of their sins, as the Council of Trent observes in its 14th session and 4th chapter. In all ages since the creation, *Do Penance* was the great theme of the servants of God, and of the holy Prophets of the old Testament, who were sent, from time to time, to reclaim sinners from their evil ways. Even before the deluge, when all flesh had corrupted its ways, Noah took care to exhort mankind to do penance. Moses inculcated the same important duty to the children of Israel in the Book of Leviticus. St. John the Baptist made the banks of the Jordan, and the deserts of Judea, frequently resound with the precept of doing penance. It was with it that our Divine Redeemer opened the career of his preaching, and the same command passed from his mouth into the mouths of the Apostles, who, as soon as they received their evangelic mission, went every where preaching to the Jews and Gentiles the necessity of being converted to God, and of doing penance for their sins. The great subject of St. Peter and St. Paul's preaching was, that sinners should return to the Lord in the sincerity of their hearts, and be baptized for the remission of their sins, doing works worthy of penance. Jesus Christ himself spoke in the same language, when he first laid himself out publicly for the conversion of sinners. *Unless ye do penance,* said he in the xiiiith chap. of St. Luke, *you will all perish ;* and in the xth chap. of St. Luke he condemns the people of *Corosaim and Bethsaida for not doing penance in sackcloth and ashes.* And again, in the xiith chap. of St. Matthew, he declares, that *the men of Ninive, who, at the preaching of the Prophet Jonas, did penance in sackcloth, with fasting and humble prayer, shall rise up in judgment against those sinners who do not renounce their sins, and endeavour, in like manner, to expiate them by works of penance.*

It was a full conviction of the indispensable necessity of penance, that formerly peopled the deserts with crowds of austere recluses and religious hermits ; it was it that persuaded thousands of both sexes, in the primitive ages of Christianity, to retire from the distracting cares and tumults of a bustling world, and pass the remainder of their days in one uninterrupted series of self-denial and mortification ; they were sensible that, as the Council of Trent remarks, *God's grace once unhappily forfeited, is not to be recovered without great labours and many penitential tears ;* they looked upon the sins that are committed after baptism to be of so heinous a nature, and so black a dye, that they believed one single mortal sin sufficient to make a Christian do penance for the whole length of an eternity. Hence it is, that penitents then voluntarily em-

braced the most laborious exercises of penance, and resolved not to spare themselves in this life, in hopes that God in his great mercy would spare them in the next life. This spirit of penance reigned for a long time in the Church of God, as appears from the rigorous austerities of the Pauls, the Antonies, the Macariuses, and from the lives of the disciples of Pachomius, and of all the renowned penitents mentioned by St. John Climacus, who treated themselves as so many criminals mercifully rescued like firebrands from the flames of hell, and suffered only to live on earth, that they might have time to make some atonement for their past offences, thereby to appease the wrath of Heaven, and prevent the rigour of God's justice hereafter. It is likewise evident, from the Penitential Canons, that this spirit of penance continued in the Church for several centuries after the establishment of the Christian religion. According to these Canons, penitents were divided into four different classes, and in proportion to the nature and quality of their crimes, they were subjected to severe weekly fasts on bread and water, in sackcloth and ashes, for the space of five, seven, ten, fourteen or fifteen years successively, and that sometimes for the expiation of a single mortal sin. It is true, indeed, the severity of this antient discipline has been gradually relaxed in succeeding ages; for when charity began to grow cold among Christians, and the fervor of the faithful was considerably abated, the Church found it expedient to mitigate the rigour of her antient canons and rules; however, this condescension of the Church to the weakness of her children, should by no means authorize our sloth and indolence, or induce sinners to neglect the essential duties of penance; on the contrary, it should make them redouble their devotion, and render them more solicitous to punish their sins of their own accord, by embracing such voluntary works of penance as are proportioned, in some measure, to the number, quality and grievousness of their sins. They should remember that sin is still as heinous in the sight of God, and as injurious to his infinite Majesty as it ever was. They should consider attentively, that the Divine Justice is still unchangeably the same, and must be satisfied and paid the last farthing. They should reflect, that every sin, great and small, must be punished either in this life or in the next, either by the voluntary penance of man, or by the vengeance of an angry God, as St. Augustine speaks. We must either do penance here or burn in flames hereafter, says this holy Doctor, *Aut penitendum aut ardensum*; penance being the sole plank of safety we have left to escape by, after suffering a spiritual shipwreck of our baptismal sanctity. It is the only means to effect a reconciliation with the offended Deity; it is the only gate by which a sinner can expect to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, when he has once unhappily shut the gate of innocence against himself by mortal sin. Let no one,

therefore, flatter himself into a false security, or imagine that he has paid off the full amount of the debt he owes to the justice of God, or that he is exempted from the obligation of doing any further penance; when he has discharged the few prayers and other light penitential exercises which are enjoined in the sacred Tribunal of Confession, according to the modern discipline of the Church. No, my brethren, a great deal more still remains to be done by ourselves for the expiation of our sins, and this is usually left to our own private devotion, that we may make up the deficiency, and supply what is wanting, by laying such voluntary penances on ourselves as are most conducive to the destruction of sin, and most suitable to our respective stations and conditions of life. Though we were even assured, as King David was by the Prophet Nathan, that our sins were forgiven both as to the guilt and eternal punishment, yet we should not rest satisfied, but should still continue the practice of works of penance all the days of our life, with a sincere will and desire to satisfy the justice of God in the best manner we are able, this will and desire being an essential part of true repentance, and springing from the very substance of contrition. Hence St. Augustine says, there is no Christian but stands in need of penance, though he should be supposed to be conscious to himself of no guilt. Our baptismal vows, the many dangerous temptations to which we are constantly exposed, the unruly passions we have to subdue, are so many arguments that prove the indispensable obligation of doing penance as long as we live in this world. What is more, the uncertainty of our justification and of our final perseverance, is sufficient to make us work our salvation constantly in holy fear and trembling; we are persuaded that we have many ways offended our God, and that if our sins are not remitted we shall be lost for all eternity. In the interim we are uncertain of the efficacy of our past repentance, and consequently we are uncertain whether we be in the state of grace or in the state of damnation. It is true, indeed, the Apostle says, *The Spirit giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the children of God*; but this inward testimony of a good conscience can never amount to an absolute certainty; it is no more than a moral conviction of the mind of being in favour with God, grounded on the love we feel for his Divine Majesty, which love produces an abhorrence to every thing that is displeasing to him, and a constant fidelity to all his commands; nevertheless, we know not whether we be worthy of love or of hatred, as the Apostle says. This should frequently alarm us; this should excite us to bewail our past sins in the bitterness of our souls, and do penance for them all the days of our life; this should make us often cry out with the Royal Prophet in his 1st Psalm, and beseech the Lord to wash us still more from our iniquity, and

to cleanse us from our former transgressions. This, in fine, plainly shews that the Council of Trent, had reason to say, in its 14th Session, *the whole life of a Christian ought to be a continual penance.*

The indispensable necessity of penance being thus established on the most solid foundation, it follows of course, that if we are bound to do penance all the days of our life, it is both our duty and interest to employ the present holy quarantine of Lent in a particular manner in doing penance, since it is a time of public and general penance throughout the whole Church of God in all parts of the Christian world. It is a time of expiation, prefigured in the old Law by the yearly feast of expiation, when the children of Israel were commanded, under pain of death, to give outward marks of inward sorrow and affliction for their sins. It is a time of purification, destined for purging away the disorders both of soul and body, and for punishing all the excesses and intemperances that are committed in the whole course of the year. It is a time of mercy and propitiation, offered to sinners to avert the wrath of Heaven and to disarm God's justice, as forty days were formerly granted to the people of Ninive to appease God's anger, and to rescue themselves from the approaching destruction with which they were menaced by the Prophet Jonas. It is, in fine, an acceptable and a favourable time to sue for and to obtain mercy, grace and salvation, because the Lord showers down his blessings more abundantly, and pours forth the riches of his mercy in greater profusion at this juncture, than he usually does at other seasons; for, as a great river overflows at certain times, and imparts an extraordinary fertility to the neighbouring plains, by discharging its waters in greater quantity than usual, though in the interim it never ceases to spread its rolling waves with much pomp and majesty, so in like manner, the mercy of God displays itself in the holy time of Lent with greater magnificence, and dispenses its gracious favours more plentifully, than at other seasons of the year, though in the interim the gifts of his infinite bounty are neither limited to any time nor confined to any place. Now it is that his heavenly treasures are unlocked for the general benefit of mankind; now it is that the gate of mercy is thrown open to all true gospel penitents; now it is that the Royal Standard of the Cross is erected, and the dolorous mysteries of Christ's Passion are commemorated; now it is that the arms of our crucified Redeemer are extended to embrace those who return to him with contrite and humbled hearts; now it is that his precious blood cries aloud to Heaven in their behalf, and his sacred head is bowed down to give them the kiss of peace.

Moreover, thousands of pious and devout Christians all over the world are at present fasting, praying and pouring out floods of penitential tears; they are besieging the throne of

God with united hearts and voices, and endeavouring to carry the kingdom of Heaven with an holy violence, like unto a numerous army that storms a city and carries all before it; they are unanimously imploring mercy, grace and salvation for the whole body of the faithful, diffused through every nation and kingdom of the earth. The ministers of the altar also, are now daily raising up their hands to Heaven, like unto Moses, and crying out to the Lord in these words of the Prophet Joel, c. ii. *Spare, O Lord, spare thy people.* What may we not then expect and hope for, my brethren, if we unite ourselves to them with a penitential spirit? Will not their fervent prayers, their alms-deeds, their fasts and penitential austerities, add considerable weight to our poor endeavours? Will not their virtuous actions and good works communicate a certain force and efficacy to the humble petition of the repenting sinner that is joined with them? Will they not serve to make it mount up to the throne of Heaven, much after the same manner that a river serves to carry a drop of water to the sea, which by itself would never be able to reach so far? The unanimous prayer of two or three assembled together in God's name, is so powerful and so acceptable, that our Blessed Saviour assures us in the Gospel, he will be in the midst of them to receive their petitions and grant their requests; nay, the Scripture says that the prayer of one just man avails much. How prevalent, how powerful, and how acceptable, then, must the united supplications of thousands of just men be? Will they not be able to disarm the justice of God, and to melt the bowels of his tender mercy into compassion? Will they not move the Almighty to look with an eye of pity on the poor sinner, who prays, fasts and repents, in conjunction with them? We read in the Book of Genesis, that the Lord formerly promised Abraham that he would spare all the unfortunate inhabitants of Sodom and Ghomorrah, if even ten just men could be found amongst them all. May we not then hope with some foundation, that he will spare the sinner who repents at this holy time, on account of the numberless multitudes of just and pious souls all over the Christian world, with whom he joins his heart and voice, and who at present are sending up every hour in the day the sweet incense of their devout prayers to the throne of God, in order to avert his wrath and move his compassionate heart to mercy? Hence it is, that the Church justly applies the following words of the Apostle to this penitential season, *Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation*; now is the favourable time for sinners to repent and expiate their sins; now is the proper time for them to be reconciled to the Lord their God. It is not an Esther, nor a Judith, nor a David, nor a Jeremiah that is doing penance at present, but it is the Holy Catholic Church, the beloved daughter of the eternal Father, and the sacred spouse of Jesus Christ; nay, it is Jesus Christ himself who is now doing

penance in his living members here on earth; it is he who pleads our cause in Heaven, and demands pardon for all repenting sinners in quality of our Mediator and Advocate with the Father, as the Apostle says. In him we have a most copious redemption, a most perfect satisfaction for all our offences, and an inexhaustible treasure to supply our wants and make up for all our deficiencies. But he requires us to repeat and contribute the small mite of our own poor endeavours? he requires the co-operation of our free-will with the graces which he hath abundantly merited for us, and which he mercifully dispenses. He created us without our own assistance, says St. Augustine, but he will not save us without our own concurrence. He will not feed us when hungry, unless we help to feed ourselves; nor raise us up when we lie down, unless we co-operate ourselves; nor preserve us from the effects of danger, unless we keep out of danger's way. Let me therefore conjure ye, my brethren, to correspond with the graces offered to ye at this holy time, and not to neglect this favourable opportunity of cancelling your sins, and of being reinstated in the friendship of your Creator. Let me entreat ye, in the words of the Prophet Isaias, c. lv. *To seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call on him while he is near.* Let me beseech ye, by all that is dear to ye, to hasten to the throne of divine grace, and to cast yourselves in spirit with the penitent Magdalen at the feet of your merciful Redeemer, that the precious blood streaming from his sacred wounds, may wash away all your iniquities. Remember, that delays are extremely dangerous, where Heaven and eternity are at stake and in manifest danger of being irreparably lost. Every moment may be your last, and the gate of Heaven may happen to be eternally shut in your face if you procrastinate your conversion, and suffer the present acceptable time of mercy and grace to slip away without endeavouring to reap any spiritual advantage from it. Perhaps you will never have so favourable an opportunity again to effect the great work of your reconciliation with God; and if, in the interim you be unfortunately lost, the fault will be your's, and the evil will lie at your own door. God is just, and he will tell you, as he told the Jews of old, *Thy perdition, O Israel, is entirely owing to thyself.*

O let me, then, exhort ye once more, to sleep no longer in the arms of perdition, to remain no longer in the deplorable state and affection of mortal sin, but to renounce, without further delay, those criminal habits of cursing, swearing and blaspheming, of drunkenness, filching and stealing, of detraction, impurity, and the like detestable vices, which render so many unhappy sinners of our days the enemies of God, the objects of his hatred, slaves of the devil, a scandal to religion, a disgrace to the Church, and a reproach to Christianity.

How many are there within the precincts of this very city who have not twenty-four hours to live? How many among them will be summoned this very night, perhaps in five or six hours hence, to appear before the bar of divine justice, and to give a strict account of twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years of their past life employed in every other affair but that of their eternal salvation? Should not the misfortune of thousands, who are thus surprized and hurried away suddenly to the other world in the midst of their sins, be a warning to ye all, my brethren, to shake off the galling yoke of Satan without delay, and to return speedily like the prodigal son, to the loving embraces of the Father of mercies, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines. Jesus Christ waits for ye, and stretches out his hand to assist and draw ye out of the precipice into which your sins have plunged ye. He calls you, he invites you, he solicits you to come and partake of the blessings of this holy time; he cries out to you in the Gospel, *Come to me all ye that are heavy laden and oppressed, and I will refresh ye.* His sacred blood is of infinite value; it is able to heal the deepest wounds of your souls, and sufficient to cancel the sins of ten thousand worlds. Arise then, O sinners, whoever ye be, arise from your lethargic sleep, and throw yourselves with confidence into the fatherly arms of his tender mercy. Your conversion may be now effected more easily than at other seasons, and it will not only edify the Church militant on earth, but likewise cause joy among the Angels in the Church triumphant in Heaven.

O Divine Jesus, who didst vouchsafe to come down from Heaven to call sinners to repentance, we have no hopes but in thee. Thou art our only refuge, resource and protection. Look down upon us, we beseech thee, with an eye of pity, and mollify our hearts into compunction. Pierce them with those nails which fastened thy hands and feet to the cross, that penitential tears may flow from us in abundance, to drown all our iniquities, to wash away all the foul stains of our sins, and to dispose our souls for the possession of that endless bliss which thou hast purchased for us at the expense of thy precious blood. And which I wish ye all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

On the Forty Days Fast of Lent.

Cum Jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit.

Matt. c. iv. v. 2.

When Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry.

Matt. c. iv. v. 2.

THE first, and the most ancient positive law that was given to man, was that of fasting and abstinence. Scarce had our first parents been created, when God commanded them to abstain from eating the fruit of a certain tree that grew in the middle of the earthly Paradise. He put them into the hands of fasting, says St. John Chrysostom, as into the guardianship and care of a pious mother, and as long as they were observant of her orders, they continued in full possession of the happy state in which they had been created; they did not incur that dreadful sentence, *Thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return*, until they yielded to intemperance, and transgressed the precept enjoined them; it was then only that they forfeited their original innocence, and shut the gates of Heaven against themselves and their posterity. Eating the forbidden fruit was the fatal source of their downfall, and the first cause of our ruin, says St. Augustine; wherefore, by a wise disposition of Providence, fasting became afterwards the happy source of our restoration, and a means of our redemption; for as Adam lost the glory of immortality, and involved his unhappy offspring in a long train of miseries and calamities, by indulging and gratifying his appetite, so Jesus Christ our Blessed Redeemer came to repair those evils by the virtue of abstinence, and to rescue mankind from the bondage of sin by the penitential exercises of fasting, self-denial and mortification. He vouchsafed to give us his life for a model, as well as his blood for a ransom, and to leave us an example of every virtue we stood in need of. Hence, as the Gospel of this day informs us, he retired into a frightful desert near the river Jordan, where he spent forty days and forty nights successively, without any earthly comfort, and macerated his virginal body with a continual fast, miraculously supporting its life, vigour and strength, that it might be able to endure, for our sake, the extremity of hunger, and the full austerity of so long an abstinence. It was in imitation hereof that the solemn fast of the forty days of lent has been instituted in the very infancy of the Church, and religiously observed ever since by the faithful in all ages throughout the known world.

It is as ancient as Christianity, and as St. Jerom says, Ep. 54. ad Marcel. has been received by tradition from the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ.

To induce you to a due and regular observance of so venerable an institution, I will lay before you the necessity and advantages of fasting, together with the manner in which we ought to fast. The necessity of fasting will teach us why we are commanded to fast; the advantages of fasting will inspire us with courage and resolution to fast; and the manner of fasting will instruct us how we are to comply with this religious duty. The necessity and advantages of fasting shall be the subject of the first point. The manner of fasting shall be the subject of the second. Let us previously implore the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

To be convinced of the necessity of fasting, we need only consider the number and enormity of our sins, the violence of our passions, and the many dangerous temptations to which we are constantly exposed. In the first place our crimes have assaulted the very throne of divine justice, and cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance. What penance have we hitherto done? What degree of atonement and satisfaction have we made for them? If we compare our lives with the lives of those illustrious penitents, who looked upon a single mortal sin as sufficient to make a sinner weep and do penance for an eternity; if we measure our past penitential works by the maxims of the Gospel, or by the penitential canons of the primitive Church, which occasionally prescribed a rigorous fast of five, seven, ten, nay sometimes fifteen years, on bread and water, and in sackcloth and ashes, for the expiation of a single mortal sin, alas! we shall find ourselves very deficient in this point. We shall acknowledge ourselves greatly in arrears, and still much indebted to the divine justice for the numberless sins whereby we have violated the solemn vows of our baptism, transgressed the sacred laws of our Creator, and defiled every organ of our senses, every faculty and power of our souls. Should we not then have recourse to fasting, to abstinence, and the like works of penance and mortification, in order to cancel these sins, to melt the tender bowels of God's mercy to compassion, and to satisfy his divine justice, the infinite weight of which we must otherwise fall under one day, since, as St. Augustine says, every sin, great and small, must be punished, either in this life or in the next, either by the voluntary penance of man, or by the vengeance of an angry God. That fasting is a necessary ingredient of penance, and a most powerful means to disarm the justice of God, and to avert his indignation, appears clearly from several parts of the sacred scriptures. The Old Testament informs us that God himself enjoined fasting on sinners, expressly exhorting them by his Prophets to be converted with their whole heart

in fasting, in weeping, and in mourning. The memorable fast of the people of Ninive, the fasts of King Achab and of King David, the weekly, monthly and yearly fasts, prescribed by the Jewish law, prove beyond a doubt that fasting is a necessary and powerful means to appease the wrath of Heaven.

As for the new law of grace, it is evident from the Gospel that our Blessed Redeemer has recommended fasting both by his word and example, and laid down rules and prescribed the conditions by which our fasting is to be sanctified, and rendered the acceptable fast which God requires, Matt. c. vi. v. 16. and c. xii. v. 20. He likewise foretold the Jews, that after his visible departure from the world, and glorious ascension into Heaven, his Disciples and followers should observe regular fasts, no less than the disciples of St. John the Baptist, who were remarkable for the rigour and austerity of their fasts. Far, then, from imagining ourselves freed and dispensed with in the New Testament from the necessity of fasting, as the freethinkers and libertines of our days erroneously pretend; far from flattering ourselves that we are exempted from the general law of doing penance, or discharged from the obligation of punishing and destroying sin in ourselves, we must acknowledge the necessity of executing upon ourselves something of that punishment which our manifold sins deserve.

Hence Christ expressly declares in the Gospel, that unless we do penance we shall all perish. He requires us to contribute the small mite of our own poor endeavours, in conjunction with his infinite satisfactions. It is not enough that he has paid the price of our redemption, and superabundantly satisfied for our sins, we must also co-operate on our part, and, as St. Paul speaks, fulfil in ourselves what is wanting to the application of the fruits of his passion. We must bear in our bodies some resemblance of his mortification. We must, in fine, comply on our side with the conditions which he requires, in order to obtain the remission of our sins, and to be made partakers of the infinite merits of his death.

Though we were even assured by an Angel from Heaven of our having obtained the happy remission of our sins by virtue of the holy sacraments, yet this should not encourage us to lead a slothful indolent life, or neglect the duties of fasting, abstinence, and such like penitential and satisfactory works, because though our sins should be supposed to be remitted, both as to the guilt and the eternal punishment due to them in hell, there might still remain, and usually does remain some debt of temporal punishment to be atoned for, either in this life or in the next, until we shall have paid the very last farthing to the Divine Justice, as the Gospel phrase expresses it. King David had the comfort to hear the sentence of his pardon pronounced by the Prophet Nathan sent to him by God,

and Mary Magdalen was assured by Christ himself, that her sins were remitted, yet this did not hinder either the one or the other from spending the remainder of their days in the practice of the most austere fasts, self-denials, and mortifications. This shews, my brethren, how incumbent it is on you to fast, to abstain and lead a penitential life, especially as you are so far from having the like assurance of your past sins being pardoned, that on the contrary you have but too much reason to tremble for yourselves, and to suspect the validity of your repentance, on account of your many broken promises, and your constant relapses after so many reiterated confessions.

But let us suppose that you have approached the sacraments of reconciliation with the proper dispositions, and that your former sins have been fully expiated both as to the guilt and the entire punishment due to them, which no one can have a certainty of during the course of this mortal life without a special revelation from God; let us even suppose that you have hitherto preserved your baptismal innocence pure and undefiled, which few, very few can promise themselves, it would even, in this supposition, be still necessary for you to fast and practice works of self-denial and mortification, in order to subdue your passions, to conquer the various temptations that surround you, and to preserve yourselves from the danger of falling into new sins. You are to fast, says St. Basil, because you have sinned; and you are to fast, likewise, in order to prevent the danger of falling again into sin; fasting being not only a powerful means to obtain pardon of the sins already committed, but also a sovereign antidote against future sins, and a most effectual remedy to overcome temptations, to vanquish the devil, and defeat all his malicious designs.

Fasting bridle concupiscence, quenches the flames of lust, restrains the violence of the passions, tames the rebellious flesh, and heals the disorders of the body as well as of the soul. Fasting is the best physic to prevent and to remove many corporal distempers, and the surest means to re-establish a broken constitution; for it has been often proved by experience that diseases have been cured by abstinence and fasting which obstinately defied all the power of the strongest medicines. The wonderful effects of fasting appeared visibly in Moses, Elias, Judith, and Sampson, Daniel and the Hebrew children in the captivity of Babylon. It was by fasting that the holy martyrs rendered themselves terrible to the devil, and impenetrable to all his fiery darts. It was by fasting that the Antonies, the Pauls, the Macariuses, the Jeromes, the Hilarions, and numberless other recluses and solitaries in the desert prolonged their lives to an amazing length. It was by fasting that they triumphed over their passions, defeated the spiritual enemies of their souls, raised the lofty tower of evangelical

perfection, and arrived at the summit of virtue. It was, in fine, by fasting that Jesus Christ prepared himself for combatting against Satan in the desert. He was incapable of being overcome by any temptation, as his divinity placed him in a region above sin. He had neither faults to expiate, nor passions to suppress, nor evil inclinations to destroy, nor even virtue to acquire, as he was holiness itself; but he was willing to teach us by his example with what weapons we are to arm and defend ourselves against all the assaults and suggestions of the devil, the world, and the flesh. He fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert. He stood in no need of fasting for himself. He fasted for our sake and for our sins. Can we then refuse to copy after the example he has set us, and to join our fasts with his; we, alas! who have so many sins to atone for, so many vicious affections to combat, so many unruly passions to subdue, so many evil habits to master, so many dangerous temptations to encounter both within and without? Can we any longer doubt of the necessity and the signal advantages of fasting? Should not the example of our Divine Redeemer animate us above all things to the practice of this noble virtue, and make us blush at the thoughts of our past negligence and tepidity? Should it not inspire us with courage to begin the present solemn fast of lent with cheerfulness for his sake, and to go through it in the spirit of compunction, and in the manner we are directed by the Church? When sanctity of life and purity of morals were the distinguishing character of Christians, it is almost incredible to what lengths they pushed the virtue of fasting. The accounts that ecclesiastical history gives of their austerities are really amazing, and more than sufficient to confound our remissness and sloth. They shew plainly how ill-grounded the murmurs and complaints of many of our modern christians are, and what our nature is capable of bearing notwithstanding our pretended delicacy, had we but a little more piety, courage and resolution. But alas! a carnal, sensual and epicurean life is now a days become so fashionable in this nation, heretofore so renowned for fasting, that several Catholics, resembling the children of Israel in the captivity of Babylon, are but too ready to swallow the unsanctified notions, and imitate the example of unprincipled and irreligious men with whom they converse. Nay, some of them are neither afraid nor ashamed to exclaim against the precept of fasting, and to cry down the days of abstinence as boldly as the most strenuous advocates of self-love, *whose God is their belly, and whose end is perdition*, as the Apostle speaks. They even quote Scripture in support of their irreligious proceedings, as Satan himself quoted Scripture against the Son of God, when he had fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert. As for the words of St. Paul, which they erroneously recur to, it is to be observed that they only condemn a scrupulous enquiry and abstinence from cer-

tain eatables, from a superstitious notion of their being unclean in their own nature, or created by some evil principle; for the Apostle is so far from disapproving the fasts of the Church, or the abstaining, at certain times, from certain nourishing and agreeable meats through a motive of religion, and by way of self-denial and mortification, that he expressly says, Ep. ad Rom. and 2 Cor. c. vi. that it is good to abstain from flesh and wine for the spiritual advantage of the soul; but they reply, *What goes into the mouth, does not defile the soul.* It is true that there is no uncleanness in the food going into the mouth that will defile the soul of him who does not, like the Pharisees, first wash his hands, as our Saviour told them; but if what goes into the mouth be a transgression of the precept of God, or a fast commanded by the Church, the disobedience thereby incurred will defile the soul of the offender; and thus Adam was defiled by eating the forbidden fruit, a Jew would have been defiled by eating swines flesh, and a drunkard is defiled by swallowing a considerable quantity of intoxicating liquors.

In the primitive ages of Christianity, the faithful fasted every day in Lent till after sun-set, and what they eat then was plain wholesome food, so common and so cheap as to occasion a great saving in the expenses of their tables, all that was thus saved being distributed in charity amongst the poor; which made St. Augustine say, that one of their reasons for fasting on one meal was, that the poor might receive what would be otherwise spent on account of a second meal. One meal, or refecton, in the four-and-twenty hours, was all that was thought of on a fasting day, and that same was confined to such narrow circumstances, that the fasts of our days, compared to them, scarce have the appearance of fasts. Nice and delicate dishes, which are calculated rather for luxury than for mortification, rather for feasting than for fasting, were carefully banished from their tables. To drink on fasting days, except at the meal hour, was no less forbid than to eat. The use of wine, and of other strong liquors, was not even allowed at the meal, as St. Augustine informs us, l. 3, contra Faustum, c. 4, for it was the opinion of our pious ancestors, that a true fast required an abstinence from drink as well as from meat, which made St. Gregory of Nysse say, *We endure both hunger and thirst, in hopes of being admitted one day to drink of the fountains of living waters*; and St. Basil adds, *We abstain from flesh and wine, and live on pulse, and drink only water, as Adam did in Paradise in the state of innocence.* So far were the primitive Christians from resembling those Catholics of our days, who take the liberty of drinking a considerable quantity of wine, drams, and strong malt liquors between meals, with little or no remorse, and who pretend to justify themselves herein by quoting that common and ill-grounded saying, *Liquid breaks no fast*, with as much confidence as if it was to be found among the Pro-

verbs of Solomon, or the sacred Canons of the Council of Trent. But this is a new maxim that the ancients were unacquainted with; they knew nothing of such unwarrantable liberties, nor of suppers and collations on fast days, except the spiritual collations and pious conferences that were in former ages usually held in the evening on fast days, for the refreshment of the soul. These spiritual collations, in process of time, have degenerated into corporal collations, which, besides the one meal of fasting-fare that is allowed in the afternoon on fasting days, the modern discipline of the Church also tolerates at night, provided we keep within the regular bounds both as to the quality and quantity, which should not exceed a quarter or one-fourth of an ordinary supper, or thereabouts. Some divines restrain the quantity of a collation to two ounces, others to four ounces at most. As for a breakfast on a fast day, the very word *breakfast* itself gives us a hint of our duty, and tells us that it is a formal breach of the fast, unless there subsists a just cause or some weighty reason for taking a morsel of bread, a cup of chocolate, or some small matter in the morning, by way of preservative to prevent cholics or other dangerous complaints. Those who have a mind to fast in a Christian manner, ought to remember, that it is not sufficient to comply with the bare letter of the law, but they must keep up to the spirit of the Church as near as possible, and take care not to defeat or counteract the end for which the fast was ordained. The outward ceremony will not avail if we neglect the essence and substance; a bare abstinence from meat is nothing more than the shell or the external bark of our obligation; the main design of the fast is to mortify our passions and amend our lives; we must fast with a deep sense of repentance for having offended God, and a hearty desire and resolution of a new life. As for the sick and infirm, who are unable to fast on one meal, or even to abtain, and whose poverty and hard labour are incompatible with fasting, and render their whole life, as I may say, one continual Lent, as is the case of a great number of the laborious poor, they must bear their disorders, sufferings, hardships, crosses, and afflictions with greater patience and resignation, in order to make up, by the interior spirit of penance, what their bodily infirmities will not allow them to perform. They are not to take the liberty of living without rule or restraint at this holy time, but must endeavour to take what part they are able in the general penance of the Church; they must make up the deficiency, and supply what is wanting to the outward fast and mortification of the body by inward spiritual mortifications, by fervent prayers, by bountiful alms, if they are able, and by other good works; for though they may be dispensed with in the rigorous observance of the Lent, yet they are not, they cannot be dispensed with in the obligation of doing penance for their sins, this being a divine and indispensable precept that must be complied with by some means or

other in our power. The great and general fast of every Christian is to fast from sin, from drunkenness, from thieving, from cursing, swearing, and blaspheming. This fast admits of no dispensation, but is absolutely necessary at all times, in all places, and for all persons, both young and old, sick and healthy, rich and poor, during the whole course of their life; therefore, St. Augustine says, Let us above all things fast from sin, that our fasts may not be rejected, like the fasts of the Jews, mentioned in ch. lviii. of Isaias. Let us fast from pride, from covetousness, from lechery, from anger, from gluttony, envy and sloth. Let us fast from every other vice, that whilst our bodies abstain from food, our souls may be nourished with divine grace. Our eyes, which have often led us into the snares of Satan, should fast in their way from curiously beholding vain and criminal objects; they should fast from theatrical shews, stage entertainments, play-books, novels and romances. Our ears should be henceforth shut to all poisonous discourses, and only open to edifying instruction and Christian conversation. Our tongues should abstain from slander and detraction, and be employed in glorifying the name of God, in proclaiming his mercies, and craving pardon of our sins. In short, our hands should fast from immoral actions, our hearts from irregular desires, and all our senses and faculties from the dangerous occasions of sin. This is the true fast, says St. John Chrysostom; for what does it avail to abstain from certain meats, and to wallow in sin? What does it avail to refrain from drinking wine, and to be drunk with iniquity? says St. Ambrose. What does it avail to emaciate our faces, and to grow pale with fasting, if our souls be full of pride, and black with envy and malice? The first condition that must accompany our fasts, is to renounce sin and so fast with a penitential spirit, with a contrite and humbled heart. The second condition is, to fast with a pure intention of pleasing God, through a motive of religion, of penance, of mortification, of obedience to the Church, and not like the Pharisees, through a motive of vain glory and hypocrisy; not like misers, through a motive of avarice; not like epicures, through a motive of gluttony; nor like Mahometans, through a motive of superstition; but, like good Christians, through religious and proper motives. The third condition is, to join fervent prayers and abundant alms with our fasts, according to the advice that the Archangel Raphael gave to Tobias, when he said, *Prayer is good with fasting and alms-deeds, more than to lay up treasures of gold*; at least prayer and fasting should always go hand in hand together, as inseparable companions; they are the two wings of a repenting soul, by the help of which she ascends to Heaven and effects her peace with God. Such fasts as these, accompanied with devout prayers and bountiful alms, cannot fail of being acceptable to God, at this holy time, when the universal Church all over the world, joined in one great body,

is unanimously suing to Heaven for mercy and pardon by a general penance. Let me then entreat you all, with the words of the Prophet Joel, c. ii. to sanctify in this manner this solemn fast of Lent. Let me beseech those who are in the unhappy state of mortal sin, to approach without delay the sacred Tribunal of Penance with the necessary dispositions, that their fasts, their alms-deeds and prayers may become more pleasing and more meritorious in the sight of God, by being performed in the state of grace. Perhaps this will be the last Lent that many of you will ever live to see. Let me then exhort you to live soberly, justly and piously during it, and not to convert these days of mercy, grace and salvation, into days of gambling, rioting, drunkenness and perdition. Do not turn the remedy into poison; do not make this holy, this acceptable time, so proper to appease the anger of God, serve only to provoke him more. Unite your fasts with the forty days fast of your blessed Saviour, and lament all the sins and offences of your life in the bitterness of your souls; for it is just that your sins should draw bitter tears from your eyes, since they drew streams of blood from the veins of your loving Jesus. O amiable Redeemer! blessed for ever and praised be thy holy name; how great is thy mercy, O Lord, in having spared us so long, and in giving us still time to repent. By the same mercy we beseech thee, to give us grace to go through this penitential season, and perform this holy quarantine with fervor and zeal, with piety and devotion, that being freed from the galling yoke of Satan, and purified from the foul stains of sin, we may be duly qualified to approach the venerable Sacrament of thy blessed Body and Blood at the solemnity of Easter, and that after celebrating worthily the anniversary of thy sacred Passion and death, we may rise with thee to a new life, and partake of the happy fruits of thy glorious resurrection. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

On the Deplorable State of a Christian, who is Cold and Insensible with regard to Heaven.

Domine bonum est nos hic esse.—Matt. c. xvi. v. 4.

O Lord, it is good for us to be here.—Matt. c. xvii. v. 4.

THE Church, in order to strengthen the faith, nourish the hope, inflame the charity, and animate the zeal of her children in this holy time of penance and mortification, proposes for the subject of this day's gospel the mystery of the glorious transfiguration of

our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which happened on Mount Thabor in the presence of three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John his brother; for as these were afterwards to be the sad eye witnesses of his bloody agony in the garden of Gethsemani, and of his crucifixion on Mount Calvary, it was expedient that they should likewise be spectators of the glorious transfiguration of his sacred humanity, and behold a transient ray of the splendor and majesty of his divinity displayed on Mount Thabor. Moses, the legislator of the Jews, and Elias, the most zealous of the Prophets of the old Law, appeared at the same time on the Mount, standing by Jesus Christ, overshadowed by a bright cloud, and, as it were, bearing testimony that he was the Messias, promised both by the Law and the ancient Prophets, whom they represented. The three disciples were in transports and raptures of joy, when they beheld the face of their dear Lord and Master shining like the sun, and his garments becoming on a sudden as white as the driven snow. They imagined themselves already happy, and were satisfied to establish their mansion on the Mount; nay, Peter could not forbear crying out in the name of the rest, *O Lord it is good for us to be here*; let us not quit this charming place, but, if thou art pleased, let us make three tabernacles here, one for thee, one for Moses, and another for Elias. One bright ray, that appeared for a short time on the countenance of Jesus, had such an effect on the disciples, that they despised all earthly pleasures, and looked upon the world with scorn and disdain; they were ready to part with every thing in it, and remain on the Mount with their Lord, whom they beheld thus transformed. Yet, my brethren, his transfiguration was but an antepast, figure and glimpse of that endless glory and permanent happiness which awaits the servants of God in the kingdom of Heaven, after the toils and labours of this mortal life. It is there that the blessed may truly say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. It is there that they find themselves incessantly in ecstasies of love, and raptures of joy, because they incessantly see God face to face, and contemplate his infinite beauty and perfection for a never-ending eternity. O what a blessed sight is this? How glorious, how charming, how worthy of the most ardent desires, and the most zealous pursuits of a Christian soul? Yet alas! to seek this happiness, and to labour for the fruition and possession of God, and of his heavenly kingdom, is, of all pursuits and occupations, that which seems least to engage the attention and care of the generality of Christians, who are so strongly attached to the imaginary happiness of this transitory life, that they are insensible to the real advantages of future happiness. To dissuade you from, and guard you against this shameful indolence and culpable neglect of your sovereign happiness, and at the same time to excite you to seek the kingdom of God with fervour, is the design of the present discourse. In the first point, I will

shew you, that the state of a Christian, who is cold and insensible in regard of Heaven, is truly deplorable. The means to overcome this coldness and insensibility shall be the subject of the second point. Let us previously invoke the assistance of the divine spirit, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, whom the Angel saluted with the following words, *Ave Maria*.

To convince you that the state of a Christian, who is cold, and insensible in regard to Heaven, is truly deplorable, it may be sufficient to shew you that he lives without faith, without hope, and without charity, or the love of God; and what is a Christian without faith, hope, and the love of God, but one in a state of reprobation, and consequently exposed every moment to the evident danger of falling a sad victim to the rigours of divine justice. In the first place such a Christian may be said to live without faith; for how can he be supposed to believe that there is an Heaven, and still be so cold and insensible as not to labour for it? I do not consider Heaven at present, in as much as it is the palace of God, and the abode of the Angels and Saints; but what I consider is, what is proposed to us in this most charming mansion of bliss, as the principal recompence of Christian virtues and good works. And this is nothing less than God himself, in the sight, love and enjoyment of whom, consists the essential beatitude of the soul. It is this ravishing object that the blessed behold for ever face to face, and by the contemplation of his infinite beauty they are set on fire with a seraphic flame of love: This love transforms them into the beloved object, and by a wonderful union puts them in possession of God himself, and consequently in possession of all his perfections. O thrice happy souls! what can be wanting to complete their joy, when they have within and without them a vast ocean of felicity, with an absolute certainty that this felicity will be as lasting as an endless eternity? It is this lasting, this unspeakable happiness, that I propose to your consideration, when I speak to you now of Heaven. This is the object of your faith. This is what you are to believe. In reality do you believe it? *Credis hoc?* as Christ our Lord said to Martha, when he spoke to her of the eternal life that follows the resurrection. And why may I not say in like manner to so many cold and insensible Christians of our days, who scarce ever raise up their thoughts to Heaven. Do you in reality believe that there is an Heaven. Do you believe that all your happiness is centred in Heaven, and that nothing less than God himself is to be your happiness, and the only delightful object that is to satiate all your desires? But how can you be supposed to believe it, when you do nothing to acquire it? How can you be supposed to believe it, whilst you do every thing to lose it? From these two reflections, it may be judged what your faith is. First you do nothing for Heaven; you do nothing for it, in comparison of what sinners do to gratify

their criminal passions. At least you do nothing for Heaven in comparison of what you yourselves do to preserve your corporal health, to recover out of a dangerous malady, to protract life for a few years, to establish a fortune for yourselves and your children, or to gain the affection and esteem of those who can be serviceable to you in promoting your temporal interest.

In effect, does the business of your salvation take up much of your time? Would you not judge a man certainly ruined in his temporal affairs who would be as careless and as indolent about them as you are in the affair of eternity? And by applying so little to it, on what grounds can you promise to yourselves that the issue of it will be favourable to you? Have you the courage to take the same pains, to undergo the same fatigues for Heaven, that you take and undergo to please and shine in the world, to indulge your sensuality, to live at your ease, and enjoy your pleasures? Do you devote as much time, as much application to Heaven, as you do to dress, to visiting, to gambling and other amusements, which ye look on as necessary to your station of life? A shameful comparison indeed, which is sufficient to cover the cold and insensible Christian with confusion; and yet it is this, that Solomon endeavours to imprint in our mind, when he exhorts us to seek true wisdom with the same ardour that we seek gold and silver, and with the same labour, that it costs worldlings to acquire perishable treasures, and to extract metals out of the bowels of the earth, Prov. ii. 4.

It is to this same emulation we are invited, when the Son of God exhorts us in the Gospel to manage the affair of salvation like unto merchants, who are embarked in trade and traffic, Luke, c. xiv. v. 13. and when he places before our eyes the example of those workmen who labour in the vineyard at all hours of the day; and the example of the wise virgins, who are awake the whole night, expecting the arrival of their spouse, Matt. c. xxv. and when St. Paul exhorts to watch the enemies of our souls like soldiers, always on guard, that so we may be constantly prepared to fight the battles of salvation with the arms of faith, Tim. vi. 11. All this clearly teaches us, that the desire of Heaven should have at least the same effect on us that the desire of gain, of pleasure, of honour, of fortune, of life, of health, has; and that the thoughts of Heaven alone should lead us to combat for it with so much the more fervour and alacrity, as the supreme, the sovereign good, is infinitely above all the goods and perishable treasures of this world.

Notwithstanding what power have these thoughts over us, what effect do they produce in us? Alas! almost nothing to lead us to the practice of virtue, and next to nothing to sweeten the crosses and afflictions of this life. Speak of Heaven to a Christian in sorrow and affliction; tell him these are

crowns of glory prepared for those who suffer here with patience and resignation; tell him that it is God, who distributes all the crosses and afflictions in this world, as so many powerful means of our sanctification and salvation. This is a dry insipid language, incapable to touch his heart. But has he incurred the displeasure of a powerful protector, assure him of a speedy reconciliation; has he met with temporal losses, announce to him a considerable fortune, unexpectedly fallen to him; does he weep for the death of a friend or relation, propose to him parties of pleasure and amusement, his grief and concern will soon abate, his usual calmness and serenity will speedily return. Thus he consoles himself in his misery and affliction by the prospect of those very things which may be to him the cause of new misery and misfortune, and he will not console himself with the hope of Heaven, and the prospect of a state exempt from every sort of misery, abounding with every kind of good, and which is nothing less than to see and enjoy his God for an endless eternity. Ye will say, perhaps, that ye do not think of this. May I not reply that it is because ye do not believe it? for how can ye have a true belief of Heaven, and this belief not move ye to do and to suffer what is necessary to acquire Heaven? How can ye have a true belief of Heaven, and this belief suffer ye to do every thing to lose Heaven, and by this loss to render yourselves irretrievably miserable for ever and ever?

In effect how opposite is the life that most Christians lead to the faith which they pretend to profess? Had the Saviour of the world come down here on earth to announce a law favourable to the corrupt inclinations of flesh and blood; had he promised Heaven to cursers, swearers, drunkards and blasphemers, and to such as would surpass the very Pagans in criminal excesses, and in all the shameful vices of their fabulous deities; in order to conform to such injunctions, and obtain the benefit of such promises, would it be necessary, in such a supposition, to lead any other life than what we see the generality of those lead who bear the name of Christians? And yet it is on the contrary only to an absolute retrenchment of all these vices and criminal excesses, that our Blessed Saviour has attached a crown of immortal glory. How then can you be said to believe this, when you retrench nothing; when you abstain from nothing, but rather do every thing, and perpetuate every kind of sin, that can strip the unhappy offender of this crown of glory, and exclude him eternally from the kingdom of Heaven?

What answer can you give to St. Paul, who proposed to the Corinthians the example of those who formerly contended in the Isthmian games for the honour of victory? Did they not, says the Apostle, refrain themselves from all things? Instead of overcharging nature with superfluities, did they not refuse it almost the necessaries of life? Did

they not sacrifice every sense of delight to the expectation of conquest? Did they not triumph over themselves, that they might triumph over their rivals? What then should we do, concludes the Apostle; we who are engaged in a more noble contest, we who run a race not for the vain recompence of a fading garland of flowers, or the empty praises of biassed mortals, but for an incorruptible crown of glory in Heaven? If Pagans were able to force nature to discipline and regularity, and to subdue its most impetuous sallies upon the feeble prospect of receiving a crown of vine branches amidst the huzzas and applauses of an insignificant multitude, with what force can Christians remain indolent and inactive, when they have the grace of God for their assistant, and nothing less than Heaven itself for the prize of their victory? Can they have a true faith, a true belief of the important truths which the reasoning of St. Paul conveys, and still be cold and insensible for Heaven? Nay, what is more, can a true Christian hope be compatible with such coldness and insensibility? When we hope for, when we desire any considerable good, we shew how impatient we are to enjoy it, we speak of it frequently, we entertain ourselves with pleasure on so agreeable a topic, we anticipate with a thousand wishes the real possession of it; and for this reason our Saviour says in the Gospel, *that where our treasure is, there is our heart*, that is to say, there our affections and desires center. To be convinced of this truth you need but consult yourselves, and examine the emotions of your own hearts. Consider with what ardour, with what passion you seek the goods of this world. The privation of them, a delay which debars you of the possession of them, seems to you painful and afflicting. But we may say with St. Cyprian, that in regard to Heaven, cold and insensible Christians are prevaricators of their hope as well as of their faith. When you daily say in the Lord's Prayer, *thy kingdom come*, you ask of God that you may be so happy as to arrive at his eternal kingdom, and still you doat on the earth, the place of your exile. You conjure the Lord by your prayers, to hasten the day of your liberty, and still there is nothing you fear more than to quit this life, where you are but miserable captives. You look upon Heaven as your native home, as the place of your future abode and eternal residence, and yet the generality of mankind would willingly remain here always on earth, was there not an inevitable necessity for departing from it. Is not this to be prevaricators of your hope, because surely we do not fear what we hope for, we do not shun what we desire, we do not endeavour to escape what we passionately wish for? In vain, then, do you say that Heaven is the object of your hopes, whilst you are cold and insensible in regard of it; in vain do you pretend that Heaven is the object of your wishes, whilst there is nothing so afflicting to you as the apprehension

of quitting this world, and whilst there is nothing you tremble at so much as at the thoughts of death, without which you cannot expect to be put in possession of eternal happiness. Your coldness and insensibility for Heaven plainly shews, that you are void of true hope as well as of true faith; nay, not only void of true faith and true hope, but also void of the true love of God. This is what should alarm you, my brethren, since, whoever is void of the love of God is in a state of reprobation. Without the love of God all other Christian virtues, humility, probity, mortification, devotion, nay, martyrdom itself, would be unprofitable. This love does not consist in words, nor in a certain regular routine of vocal prayers, as some imagine; but it consists in an actual and absolute preference of God to every thing that is not God, and consequently, to your goods, to your pleasures, to the world, to life, and even to yourselves. This being supposed, do you think that negligence, coldness, and insensibility for Heaven, are compatible with the love of God? Can you believe that a Christian loves God, when he is not touched with concern in seeing himself separated from God, or when he does not desire to be re-united to God, or when he fears that moment which is to put him in possession of God? Can this be called love in the practice and language of the world? What, my brethren, to love God! shall this be to have no other emotions in the heart than those which ye feel for objects about which ye are quite indifferent? Shall Christians flatter themselves that they love you, O my God, when they feel no desire to enjoy you, nor any regret for not enjoying you? By no means. In this situation, far from being able to say with truth, *I love my God*, they have not begun to love him, as St. Augustine remarks, in Ps. lxxxix. v. 11. because God has not in their hearts an absolute and entire preference above all the pleasures, goods and comforts of this life. This appears evidently from their conduct. They are slaves of this world, eager in the pursuit of the conveniences and advantages of this life, but entirely negligent of whatever concerns the life to come; they are passionately fond of things which are either hurtful or unprofitable to them, and they interest themselves but little for what is of infinite consequence to them, and for which they should be perpetually in action, perpetually in motion, perpetually in alarms; nay, to consider their coldness and insensibility for Heaven, one might infer that their God, of all things, has the least share in their esteem and affection, and that a happy eternity is to them, of all objects, the most indifferent. May I not then conclude, that such Christians live without faith, without hope, and without charity or the love of God? O deplorable coldness and insensibility, that hurries on thousands to everlasting misery! But what are the means to overcome this coldness and insensibility? This is the subject of the second point, which I will reduce briefly to a few words.

To overcome your coldness and insensibility for Heaven, you are to meditate on this blessed mansion of glory, and on the happiness of seeing and enjoying God there for all eternity. To this meditation you are to add the consideration of what all the saints have done and suffered, in order to purchase for themselves this unspeakable bliss. These considerations, sinking deeply in your mind, with the blessing of God will animate you to labour fervently and constantly for the same end. This is what employed the thoughts of the saints whilst here on earth, and inspired them with so much contempt and indifference for the painted toys, empty bubbles, alluring pleasures, delusive charms and perishable goods of this world; this is what made them labour so much, do so much, and suffer so much in this life, to insure for themselves the incomprehensible joys and permanent happiness of the kingdom of Heaven. They kept all the commandments; they observed the counsels and maxims of the Gospel; they fulfilled every duty towards God, towards themselves, and towards their neighbour. In the midst of riches they preserved a spirit of evangelical poverty; in the midst of grandeur they preserved a spirit of humility; in the midst of the world they preserved a spirit of retreat; and in the midst of all the advantages and conveniences of life, a spirit of penance and mortification. They carried their zeal still farther, or if you will, their zeal carried far greater lengths. If we pass over to the deserts of Egypt, and consider the lives of the famous solitaries of Thebais, we shall behold them shut up in the inclosures of rocks, of grottoes and caverns, always watching, always fasting, always praying, always meditating, and resembling Angels rather than mortal men; nay, after fifty or sixty years of solitude, spent thus in the service of God and in the constant practice of self-denial and mortification, they looked upon themselves as unprofitable servants to whom no reward was due. After all they had done they were humble in their own eyes, and so far from being elated with any presumption or self-complacency, that they judged themselves unworthy to be admitted into the mansions of eternal bliss, or to obtain even the lowest place amongst the elect, because they counted only on the great mercy of God, who, in crowning the merits of his servants, crowns the favours and gifts which he himself liberally heaps on them, as St. Augustine speaks. What shall I say of the holy martyrs and glorious combatants of the militant Church, who gave their blood and suffered death in testimony of their faith and in the cause of virtue? What excruciating tortures did not the barbarity of tyrants invent to torment them? Yet the hope of reigning eternally with Jesus Christ in the glory of Heaven, sweetened the bitter chalice of all their sufferings, and made death, even in its most terrifying shape, appear acceptable to them. *Expecting the blessed hope, and the coming of the great God, as the Scripture says, they contended*

to enter in at the narrow gate, and to carry the kingdom of Heaven by an holy violence to nature. Their example should excite you to labour with assiduity, fervour and perseverance, for the acquisition of the same happiness which they now enjoy, and for which you have been created. It is your interest as well as your duty to exert yourselves with uncommon zeal in a business of such importance. You should have it more at heart than any thing in this world, and be ready to sacrifice whatever is dearest to you on earth, rather than sacrifice your souls, and lose Heaven, for a never-ending eternity. Many of you, my brethren, are now, perhaps, at the eve of your death, and shortly to be summoned before the Tribunal of the living God, there to give an account of twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years of your life, employed in every other affair but that of your salvation. What good works have you done? What provision have you made to insure Heaven for your souls? What penance have you done to expiate the sins whereby you have defiled the white robe of your baptismal innocence? What restitution have you made to your neighbour for his property, which you have unjustly acquired, and which you as unjustly possess? What reparation have you made of the characters which you have blackened and injured? What steps have you taken to remove the scandal which you have given by your bad example? Be not deceived, my dear brethren, these duties must necessarily be complied with, and you are not only to *avoid evil*, but also to *do good* in order to be entitled to admission into the kingdom of Heaven, into which, according to the sacred Scripture, *nothing that is defiled, can enter*. Look upon us, O Lord, we beseech thee, with the eyes of pity, and excite in us a penitential abhorrence of our past errors and neglects; grant that we may henceforth seek, first, the kingdom of Heaven, and make it the principal object of our desires, the centre of our wishes, and the grand subject of our labours and pursuits. Give us grace to love thee sincerely, to serve thee faithfully, and to look upon it as our only happiness to be for ever united to thee, in the sacred mansions of the heavenly Jerusalem, which thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants, and which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

On the Necessity and Qualities of Sacramental Confession.

Erat Jesus efficiens dæmonium, et illud erat mutum.—Luc. c. xi. v. 14.

Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb.—Luke, c. xi. v. 14.

THE person possessed of a dumb devil, mentioned in this day's gospel, was an emblem of those unhappy sinners who are silent when the honour and glory of God, the edification of their neighbour, and the welfare of their own souls call on them to speak out, and to make a Christian use of the gift of speech. He was a figure of those who choose to continue dumb miserable slaves under the tyrannical yoke of Satan, rather than open their mouths to sue for the divine mercy by a true repentance, and to give ease to their own conscience by an humble and candid confession of their sins. They may with propriety be truly accounted dumb in a moral sense, who neglect and refuse to employ their tongues for this salutary purpose, or who dissemble, hide and conceal, through a false modesty, at the sacred Tribunal, what they were neither afraid nor ashamed to commit in the presence of the all-seeing God. In such cases sinners may be said to be spiritually possessed of a dumb devil, who ties up their tongues, that the hands of God's mercy may be for ever shut against them, and who persuades them either to abandon the Sacrament of Penance entirely, or to profane it sacrilegiously by imperfect and defective confessions, that he may have a more favourable opportunity to fortify himself strongly in their souls, and establish a kind of dominion over them. Convinced of the manifold advantages of a true and sincere confession, he is ever industrious to withdraw sinners from it, and to render them more averse to the remedy than to the disease; he fills them with confidence to sin and shame to confess. Thus it is, says St. John Chrysostom, that the devil inverts the order established by Almighty God, which is, that we should be ashamed to commit sin, and that we should glory in confessing our sins; but the sworn enemy of our souls usually robs sinners of all shame, and makes them throw off all fear when he tempts them to sin. On the contrary, when the sin is once accomplished, he returns upon them with a new snare, and makes them restitution of their shame, in order to engage them in the desperate resolution

either of neglecting sacramental confession, the only sanctuary they have left to secure their salvation, or of playing the hypocrite in pretending to be religiously devout, at the very time they are sacrilegiously wicked. To caution you against such dreadful evils, and to dispose you the better for complying with your Easter duty in a Christian religious manner, is the design of the following discourse. In the first part I will shew you the indispensable necessity of sacramental confession, and the manner in which you are to prepare yourselves for it; in the second part I will point out to you the dispositions which must necessarily accompany sacramental confession, in order to render it acceptable to God and available to the repenting sinner. In short, the nature and conditions of a good sacramental confession shall be the entire subject of the following discourse, and of your favourable attention; no subject being more suitable to this penitential season, or more deserving of your particular notice, as your happy reconciliation with your offended Creator depends on a religious compliance with this important obligation at this holy time. Let us previously invoke the aid of Heaven, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

To be convinced of the necessity of sacramental confession, for such as have violated the laws of the Gospel, forfeited their baptismal innocence and relapsed into the bondage of Satan, after having been washed and purified by the precious blood of the Lamb of God, we need but consider attentively the commission which our Divine Redeemer gave his Apostles and their lawful successors in the ministry. It is evident from the xvth and xviith chapters of St. Matthew, and from the xxth chapter of St. John, that he fulfilled his promise of giving them the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and that he imparted to them an unlimited power to bind and loose, to forgive and retain sins, with a solemn declaration that whatsoever they would bind or loose on earth, should be bound or loosed in Heaven, and that whosoever sins they would forgive or retain on earth, should likewise be forgiven or retained in Heaven. He therefore laid an indispensable obligation on the faithful to confess their sins, in order to have them remitted or retained; and, of course, sacramental confession in the Tribunal of Penance is a divine institution, and a positive injunction of Jesus Christ; for unless the faithful were positively enjoined in the performance of this humiliating and painful duty, the pastors of the Church could not possibly execute the commission entrusted to them, nor exercise the power with which they are invested; they could not come to the knowledge of the cause on which they are to decide, nor be able to judge what sins are to be forgiven; what sins are to be retained; they would not be able to distinguish between leprosy and leprosy, nor to pronounce just sentence, nor to prescribe suitable remedies and preservatives against sin, nor to give the necessary and proper advice

to sinners, unless they were to be acquainted previously with the true state of their conscience by their confession. In short, the keys of the kingdom of Heaven would be useless, and the commission they received would be nugatory, as St. Augustine justly observes in his 49th Homily, where he says, To pretend that it is sufficient to confess to God alone, is to destroy the commission of Christ, to contradict the Gospel, and to make void the power of the keys which were given to the Church ; wherefore the holy doctor concludes, *Lib. de Visit. Infirm.* with these remarkable words, *If thou wilt have Heaven open to thee, open thy mouth in confession to the priest.* It is manifest from the concurring testimonies of the other ancient fathers and writers, both of the Latin and Greek Church, that sacramental confession has been practised by the faithful in all ages of the known world, and in every age since the first establishment of Christianity, which is a clear proof that they were thoroughly convinced of its being a divine institution ; for otherwise mankind would never have submitted to a law that is so mortifying to human pride. The same law that obliges a Christian to confess his sins, obliges him also to examine his conscience, to take a serious view of the state of his soul, and to use a moral diligence in discovering or finding out what sins he has been guilty of in thought, word, deed and omission ; because otherwise he cannot make an exact and faithful confession of them. In an affair of such consequence it is necessary to proceed with cool and deliberate attention, and with as much circumspection and composure of mind as reason and prudence require that a person should proceed with in other matters of great importance. It is not sufficient to take a superficial and cursory view of the outward, gross and palpable crimes which stare the sinner in the face, and which are observable to every eye ; but the inward spiritual sins which pride and self-love, human respect and worldly interest are most solicitous to hide and keep undiscovered, should be narrowly inspected, because they are often more dangerous, and inflict a deeper wound on the soul, as the Council of Trent remarks, Sess. 14. c. 5. than the notorious and scandalous sins which are openly committed. The secret recesses and folds of the heart must be looked into and closely searched, and the wounds of the soul must be probed to the bottom, in order to dislodge the corruption and venom that lurk within. The axe is to be laid to the root, and the spring and source of every sinful disorder is to be investigated. The principles and motives upon which a person has acted must be carefully weighed, and an impartial inquiry is to be made into our thoughts and desires, intentions and corrupt inclinations, evil habits and customary failings, darling passions and favourite vices. Unless a diligent self-examination of this sort be made, we will be apt to be always a mystery to ourselves, and strangers to the real state of our souls ; for, to be blind to our own faults, and to be misled,

seduced, and deceived in the judgment we form of ourselves and of our own actions, is one of the pernicious consequences and deepest wounds of original sin. We are, indeed, quick-sighted enough to observe the failings of others, and as the Scripture expresses it, to discern a mote in the eye of our neighbour, at the same time that we do not perceive the beam in our own eye. We overlook our own follies, and behold every thing that regards ourselves through a fallacious medium or a kind of perspective, which either magnifies or diminishes the object. Self-love flatters us, presumption deludes us, and our passions raise a mist before the eye of reason, that often clouds and darkens the understanding. These clouds must be dispelled, this interior blindness must be removed and remedied by diligent self-examination, and by humbly and fervently beseeching the Holy Ghost to enlighten our darkness, to open our eyes, and to remove the veil that hides us from ourselves.

A constant watchfulness over all the motions of our hearts, and over our thoughts, words and actions, as far as is compatible with human frailty, and a daily examination of conscience in the evening when the hurry of business is over, are the most effectual means to make us know and become familiar with ourselves; they also contribute in a great measure to facilitate the scrutiny which is necessary to be made before sacramental confession. The ten Commandments of God, the maxims of the Gospel, the precepts of the Church, the virtues and duties of a Christian life in general, and the particular obligations of our respective states and departments in social life, are the rule and standard we are to be guided by in our examination, and not by the false maxims or prevailing customs and fashions of the world. We should allow ourselves sufficient time and leisure to dive into the secrets of our conscience, and to consider what places, what persons, what companies we have frequented; in what conversations, actions and occupations we have passed the time; in what particulars we have deviated from rectitude; in what manner we have discharged or violated the duties which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves, that we may be able to lay all our sins at the feet of Jesus Christ, with the number, as near as can be recollected, and the circumstances, which alter the nature of the sin, or notably aggravate the guilt; for it is an illusion to imagine that after several months, or perhaps years spent in the circle of pleasures and diversions, dissipation and distraction, irregularity and disorder, a person can in a short time become well acquainted with the true state of his interior, or be duly prepared to render a proper account of all his offences. In effect there is reason to apprehend that the confessions of many Christians of this description are defective and imperfect, if not null and void, for want of premising a diligent self-examination and making a regular preparation. How frequently do they run over the transactions of several months, nay, of several

years, in the space of time that would not suffice for confessing the sins of a single day? How often do they seem at a loss even for sufficient matter for the sacramental absolution, at the very time that they would discover themselves to be in a very alarming situation, did they but take the trouble of making a close inquiry into the true state of their souls? To pass over in silence many other defects and abuses, which should be carefully avoided in the sacred tribunal, some, instead of accusing themselves with candour, sincerity and humility, endeavour to extenuate their crimes with studied excuses and artful palliations. Others confess their sins like Adam and Eve, by accusing their neighbour and throwing the fault on others, saying one time, that it was owing to the peevish humour and temper of a cross passionate wife, the debauchery and drunkenness of a wicked turbulent husband, the disobedience of an headstrong incorrigible child, the roguery of a thieving servant, the injustice of a cruel master, the unreasonableness and severity of a bad mistress. Another time they allege some other cause, such as anger, passion, company, distress, fear, shame, necessity, or the like. Others, in fine, are only solicitous about the integrity of their confession, and rest satisfied when they confess what occurs to their memory, and receive absolution; but they should remember, that there are other conditions required on the part of a true gospel penitent besides the integrity of confession; he should neither be hurried on by a talkative spirit, nor tongue-tied by a dumb spirit, like the poor man mentioned in this day's gospel; he should not accuse others but himself; he should not act with disguise or dissimulation, but with candour and sincerity, since, as the Holy Ghost says, Proverb. c. xxviii. v. 13. *He who hides his wicked deeds shall not be directed, but he that shall forsake them shall obtain mercy.* In short his confession must be simple, humble, plain, true, faithful, full, entire, and accompanied with an inward grief of the heart, an hatred of sin, and a firm purpose of amendment, this being the very soul and essence of repentance, as I will shew you in the second point. The compunction or sorrow of the heart, which constitutes a true conversion, is usually called *contrition*, which word originally signifies a bruising, or breaking of a thing in pieces, and it is metaphorically used to denote the grief with which the heart of a sincere penitent is pierced, and, as it were, broken and rent asunder on account of his sins and offences against the Lord his God. This inward sorrow is so essential an ingredient of a sincere repentance, that the most complete confession will not purify the soul of a sinner, if his heart be not concerned, and grieved, and does not detest sin. It is the heart that is the seat of repentance, as it is the seat of love. It must weep over its own wretchedness, perfidy and ingratitude. It must hate and detest sin because it is offensive and displeasing to God's infinite goodness. It must love God and value his friend-

ship, in preference to every thing in the world; for as there are two great evils included in every mortal sin, repentance, which is the opposite, and the destroyer of sin, must also have two opposite conditions. The two great evils included in mortal sin, are described thus, by the Almighty, c. ii. v. 12. of the Prophet Jeremy: *My people*, says the Lord, *have done two evils*. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water; and have dug to themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water. The first of these evils is, the averting, or turning away the heart from the Creator, and the very fountain of all goodness. The second evil is, the conversion of the heart to the creature, and embracing the foul monster, mortal sin, which is justly compared to a broken cistern, that can hold no water, and is a receptacle only of filth and mud. As the heart, therefore, of the sinner is, by sin, carried away from God, and bestowed on created objects, through a misplaced affection, it is necessary that the heart be truly changed by repentance, and effectually averted from sin, and from the irregular love of the creature. Secondly, it must be converted to the Creator, and embrace him as the fountain of justice. And as it is a blind inordinate love that carries away the heart of the sinner from God, it is an holy regular love that must bring back the heart, and return it again to God, which made St. Augustine say, *Serm. 7. de temp. that nothing renders a repentance certain but the love of God, and an hatred of sin.*

The fear of hell is, indeed a useful curb to the impetuosity of the passions, and in the beginning a necessary spur to urge sinners on to their duty. It is a preparation for repentance, but of itself alone it is insufficient to banish the love of sin from the heart, because it implies no hatred of sin precisely for its own account, and as it is an offence of God, but merely in regard of the punishment that attends it. It alarms and frightens a sinner to relinquish his sinful disorders, much after the same manner that the imminent danger and apprehension of a shipwreck makes a merchant cast his merchandize into the sea, though at the same time he retains his former affection to it, and is resolved to fish it up again when the storm is over. Hence St. Augustine says, that the sinner who leaves off sinning for the fear of hell fire only, is not afraid to sin, but afraid to burn; and if he hates sin, it is not for the sake of God whom it offends, but it is for his own sake, or through some selfish consideration, because he apprehends it to be ruinous to his own interest, and prejudicial to his own happiness, or because it opens a horrid scene of misery before his eyes, and menaces him with unquenchable flames. Far from acting like an affectionate child, upon a principle of love and gratitude, he only acts like a mercenary slave, upon a principle of sordid fear, which may indeed withhold his hands from doing a criminal action, but does not change his will or affection. Hence it is that his sorrow for sin often amounts to no

more than a wish that he could sin with impunity, and for this reason he is ready to consent to any sin that is thought to be only venial, because he believes it will not make him liable to eternal punishment, whilst the offence given to God is a matter he totally disregards.

It is to be dreaded that many sinners deceive themselves in this point, and approach the sacred tribunal without being actuated with that true sorrow of heart, that holy indignation against themselves, and that penitential abhorrence of sin, which is the very soul of repentance. This is what they should chiefly aim at, and take most pains to acquire, when they are disposing themselves for receiving the sacraments of reconciliation; but unhappily several neglect what is most essential, and come only half prepared. They persuade themselves that they are penitent, provided they perform certain exterior exercises of penance, recite some devout forms of prayer, and vent a few sighs, moans and tears, which a lively apprehension, a violent fear, a sensible tenderness of complexion, may naturally force from them, without working any real conversion or change in their hearts. How often, alas! are the feelings of nature, the working of pride and self-love, the agitations of a false shame and confusion, the anxiety and trouble, that proceed merely from human respect and servile fear, mistaken for the substance and essence of a true repentance?

The contrition that qualifies the repenting sinner for the happy remission of his sins, is an emotion excited by grace, and proceeding from the operation of the spirit of God. It is *interior* and *supernatural*. It is grounded on motives of faith and religion. It springs from the love of God, which alone is able to banish the love of sin from the heart; for which reason, St. John says, *He who loveth not remaineth in death*, 1 Ep. c. iii. v. 14. It is *universal*, that is, it extends itself without exception to every mortal sin a person is guilty of. It is also the *supreme* and *sovereign* sorrow of the heart and will, that is to say, it is in reality greater than, and above all other sorrows; for as sin is the greatest of all evils, it must be hated and abhorred more than any other evil, and we are to be penetrated with a greater grief, and to have more real concern, at least in spirit, and in the superior and rational part of our souls, for the offence given to God, and for the loss of his grace and friendship by sin, than for any other evil or misfortune, or for the loss of whatever else is dearest and nearest to us in the whole world. It is another property of true contrition, to include essentially a firm purpose of amendment, with a will and desire to satisfy God's justice, by leading a new life, and bringing forth the worthy fruits of repentance, this being the grand criterion by which a true judgment may be formed of its sincerity. By the firm purpose of amendment, that springs from contrition, I mean a fixed resolution, and a full determination of the will never more to offend God by mortal sin, but

to atone for the past offences, to repair the injuries done others in their property or character, and to shun the places, the companies, and the objects, which were the cause of a person's spiritual ruin and downfall, with all other dangerous and immediate occasions of sin, though they should be as dear to him as the very apple of his eye.

Behold, my brethren, the nature and qualities of that contrition with which your confession ought to be accompanied, and which you should use your utmost endeavours to procure, by putting up, for this end, your humble and fervent prayers to him who holds in his hands the hearts of men, and who alone is able to change their dispositions, and make them hate what they pursued before with the most ardent affections. And since the Gospel assures us, that whatever we ask the eternal Father in the name of his beloved Son Jesus, shall be given to us, we should earnestly beseech him to grant us the great gift of an hearty contrition, in the name and through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ. We may be gradually led on and helped to the attainment of it by warming our hearts with fervent acts of faith, hope and charity, and by meditating attentively on the most powerful motives for exciting contrition; such as the frightful enormity, base ingratitude and crying malice of mortal sin, the dreadful torments which are due to it, the infinite goodness of God whom it offends, the passion of Jesus Christ which it renews, the incomprehensible joys of Heaven from which it excludes the unhappy sinner for a never-ending eternity, &c. These great truths, well digested and ruminated with leisure and attention, and the pious affections which they are apt to inspire, will help to melt the heart into compunction, and to kindle in it a pure love of God. When you are thus prepared and penetrated with these sentiments, you are to approach the sacred Tribunal as if you were going to the foot of the cross, with an humble confidence in the boundless mercy of God, that the precious blood which streamed down from the feet of Jesus on Mount Calvary will wash away all your iniquities. No childish fear or false shame should prevail on you to tell a sacrilegious lie to the Holy Ghost, like Ananias and Saphira, who were therefore struck dead at the feet of St. Peter, Acts, c. v. v. 3, 7. Rather copy after the humble publican, or the prodigal child returning to the embraces of his affectionate father, or the penitent Magdalen prostrate at the feet of her Divine Redeemer, and bathing them with her tears. A momentary confusion, a short humiliation before the Minister of God, who holds the place of Jesus Christ in the sacred Tribunal, will deliver you from the stings and remorse which, like so many thorns, torture your souls, and will be succeeded by interior peace, joy and consolation. The greater your crimes are, the greater will be the joy of the whole court of Heaven to see your conversion to God, testified by a good confession, since, as the Gospel as-

sure us, there is more joy among the Angels of Heaven for one sinner that does penance, than for ninety-nine just who do not stand in need of it. How much, therefore, my brethren, are we indebted to the goodness of the Lord for having provided us with so powerful a remedy for healing all our spiritual disorders, and so effectual a means of recovering his love and friendship? Let us not receive his divine grace in vain, but let us cheerfully submit to all the humiliations of penance, and return thanks to our merciful Lord for putting it in our power to purchase our pardon upon such easy terms. O sweetest Jesus, give us grace, we beseech thee to approach thy sacred Tribunal with the necessary dispositions, and to partake of the wonderful effects of thy infinite bounty. We bless and praise thy holy name for having spared us so long, and for giving us still time to repent, instead of casting us off in the midst of our sins, as we deserved. By the same mercy we pray thee to grant us a true and sincere contrition, that we may lament our past sins in the bitterness of our souls. Mollify our rocky hearts, and strike them as Moses struck the rock in the desert, that waters of penance and tears of compunction may flow from us in abundance, and wash away all our iniquities. In thee we place all our confidence, and through thy merits we hope to be ranked on the last day in the happy number of those who are to be invited by thee to take possession of the kingdom of thy glory for all eternity. Which I wish ye all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

On the Signal Advantages and Benefits of a Frequent and Worthy Communion.

Accipit Jesus panes, et cum gratias egisset, distribuit discumbentibus.

Jo. c. vi. v. 11.

Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them.

St. John, c. vi. v. 11.

THE subject of this Sunday's gospel is an illustrious miracle wrought by our Divine Redeemer in favour of a vast multitude of people, which had followed him into the desert, with an ardent desire of hearing his heavenly doctrine, and seeing the prodigies he was constantly working for the sick and infirm, who had recourse to him for relief, and stood in need of his assistance. Their piety and zeal for the glory of God, and for the eternal welfare of their souls, made them forget their corporal

necessities and neglect to carry provisions with them ; but their neglect was amply supplied by the paternal providence of the Lord, who seldom fails to manage our temporal interest and to provide abundantly for the subsistence of our bodies, when we take proper care of our souls and apply ourselves seriously to the grand affair of our eternal salvation. He has engaged his sacred word, and solemnly promised that he will not only reward us with supernatural happiness hereafter, but also crown our undertakings with temporal blessings in this life, if we seek first his honour and glory, and make the eternal salvation of our souls our chief business and principal study. *Be not solicitous*, says he, *Mat. c. vi. v. 33. saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what shall we be clothed? Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be given you besides.*

The crowds of people which, according to this day's gospel, flocked from all sides to hear the word of God, and exposed themselves to the danger of starving in a desert, in order to nourish their souls with the spiritual food of eternal life, furnish us with a remarkable instance of this truth ; for no sooner did our Blessed Saviour lift up his eyes and behold them from the top of a mountain whereon he stood with his disciples, but his affectionate heart was touched with compassion, and moved to work a great miracle in their behalf. He took into his sacred hands five small loaves which happened to be brought to him, and he blessed and multiplied them by his all-powerful words in so wonderful a manner, that twelve baskets were filled with the fragments which remained, after the whole multitude, that amounted to about five thousand persons; as the Evangelist tells us, had been satiated and had eaten plentifully thereof. This famous miracle was a type and figure of the miracle of miracles, as St. Thomas of Aquin calls it, which our Divine Redeemer wrought afterwards at his last supper, when by his almighty power he changed the substance of bread and wine into the heavenly banquet of his own precious body and blood, and bequeathed this inestimable legacy to his Church, for the refectation and nourishment of the souls of the faithful unto the end of the world. We all eat of this banquet, and still it is not diminished ; we all partake of it, and still it remains whole and entire ; one eats of it, and a thousand eat of it, and still this one receives Christ whole and entire, and the thousand do no more. Behold the stupendous prodigy that is wrought in your favour, and at the same time admire with gratitude the wonderful difference between the food granted to you, and the food that was granted to the pious multitude mentioned in the gospel. Jesus provided with a boundless liberality for their corporal wants ; he fed them with an earthly, material food ; he feeds you with a celestial divine food. Not content with sacrificing his flesh and spilling his blood for your sake on Mount Calvary he vouchsafes to nourish your souls, like the

affectionate pelican, with his own sacred body and blood in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist. To encourage the devout and fervent Christian to have frequent recourse to this sacrament, and to awake and rouse the lukewarm and slothful, I intend, with the divine assistance, to lay before you the signal advantages and happy effects of a worthy and frequent communion, and then to point out the great prejudice they do to their own souls, and the dreadful evils they expose themselves to, who for any considerable length of time neglect this Christian duty. Let us first implore the intercession of the blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

As this discourse is merely calculated for the edification of those who glory in adhering strictly to the ancient faith of the primitive Church, which has been carefully handed down from the days of the Apostles to our days, by an uninterrupted succession of upwards of seventeen hundred years, and which has been uniformly professed by the Cyrils, the Basils, the Chrysostoms, the Ambroses, the Augustines, the Gregories, and all the great luminaries of venerable antiquity, it appears unnecessary at present to take up your time, and engage your attention, with a long enumeration of the various arguments by which the Catholic doctrine concerning the mystery of the blessed Eucharist is invincibly proved against all unbelievers. You believe, my brethren, upon the infallible authority of the word of God, that the body of Jesus Christ, which was immolated on the altar of the cross for our sake, and the blood which was shed for the remission of our sins, are really present in this adorable sacrament, and inseparably united to his soul and divinity. This you believe as Christians and Catholics, but it is the misfortune of several amongst you to believe this mystery, as they do other mysteries of our holy religion, with a speculative and superficial faith only, which has but little influence on their conduct, so that the gracious condescension of our Divine Redeemer in accommodating himself to our weakness, and giving himself to us to be the food of our souls, instead of inflaming our love for him and increasing our devotion, is but too frequently repaid with inattention and indifference, if not with a total neglect of this great sacrament of his love; yet it must be acknowledged, that the more he has humbled himself here for our sake, by divesting himself, in a manner, of the splendor of his majesty, and veiling the dazzling rays of his glory under the poor elements or appearances of bread and wine, the more we are indebted to him, the dearer he should be to us, the more fervent we should be in his service, and the more assiduous in testifying our gratitude, respect and veneration for him.

Our belief of his real presence in this sacrament ought to enkindle in our hearts the most ardent desires of frequently uniting ourselves to him in it by a devout communion. He instituted it in the form of a banquet, under two distinct species,

to give us thereby to understand, as St. Augustine remarks, that he intended it should be frequented by the faithful, and should serve as a continual banquet in the Church to nourish and support the spiritual life of our souls, as corporal food serves to nourish and support the life of the body. Hence he invites us all to partake of this banquet, and assures us in chap. vi. of St. John, v. 54. that unless we have recourse to it we shall have no life in us, *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall have no life in you.* On the contrary, he expressly says, in the same sixth chapter of St. John, *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, has everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day, and he shall live for ever.* Must we not then be regardless of our own spiritual welfare if we slight this most valuable gift of Heaven? Or can we be supposed to have any great love or esteem for Jesus Christ, if instead of corresponding with his love, we refuse to accept of his affectionate invitation, and neglect to approach his sacred table with suitable piety and devotion? What great comfort, what greater felicity can we enjoy in this vale of tears and place of exile, than to partake from time to time of this divine food, this heavenly manna, this spiritual bread of eternal life?

Of all the spiritual exercises that religion commands, this is the most comfortable and the most salutary; it is in the sacred communion that spiritual sweetness is tasted in its very source, as St. Thomas of Aquin speaks; here the afflicted and sorrowful find a comforter ready at all hours to console them, and to alleviate their grievances; here the distressed find a compassionate father, always ready to succour and relieve them; here the sick and infirm find an omnipotent physician, ready and willing to heal and strengthen them; here the needy and indigent meet a most bountiful benefactor and a tender-hearted friend, ready to receive their petitions, and to grant their requests; here, in short, the faithful in general find a resource in all their necessities, a sanctuary in all their dangers, a remedy in all their infirmities, a consolation and protection in all their wants and tribulations. If the children of Israel were protected and secured against the exterminating Angel, by sprinkling the blood of the Pascal Lamb on the doors of their houses; and if Obbedom and his family obtained so many signal blessings and favours from Heaven for lodging the Ark of the Covenant in his house, what may we not expect by receiving and lodging Christ himself in person in the temple of our souls, by a worthy and devout communion? We read in the Gospel that Zachæus, the publican, was promised salvation for lodging our Blessed Saviour under the roof of his house; a woman afflicted with a tedious disorder was cured by only touching the hem of his garment; and the disciples, on their way to the castle of Emmaus, were

so sensibly affected by his company and conversation, that they felt their hearts inflamed and burning within them with the fire of divine love. Judge then what signal graces, favours and blessings, must flow from the very source of sanctity and the fountain of all grace into the soul of a devout Christian, which by a good communion is occupied, possessed and intimately united to the Son of God, and in which he dwells with his whole divinity and humanity. The bread which the Angel of the Lord ordered the Prophet Elias to eat in the desert, enabled him to pursue his journey till he arrived with safety at the mountain of Horeb. In like manner, the spiritual bread, and divine banquet which the Lord himself invites us to partake of in the holy communion, nourishes and supports the supernatural life of grace in the soul; it cherishes and invigorates its virtue, enlivens its piety, and enables it to advance daily in the paths of holiness, until it arrives at length at the very summit of Christian perfection. Nothing, says St. John Chrysostom, renders Christians more formidable to the powers of hell, than a worthy and frequent communion of the body and blood of Jesus Christ; nothing contributes more effectually to put the devil to flight, to weaken concupiscence, to extinguish the fire of lust in the heart, and to imprint a character of purity in the soul. It is a sovereign preservative against mortal sin, and a powerful antidote against venial sins and daily imperfections, as the Council of Trent teaches; it is a shield that repels all the fiery darts of Satan, and an armour that enables a Christian to withstand his most violent assaults and temptations. The happy fruits and blessed effects of frequent and devout communion, appeared visibly in the conduct of the primitive Christians; purity of morals and sanctity of life reigned among them. Coming daily from the communion table, they were courageous like lions, as St. John Chrysostom speaks; they breathed flames of charity, and ran to martyrdom with as much alacrity as if they were hastening to a triumph. There was no necessity then, as there is now, for a precept to urge and oblige the faithful to approach the holy communion; they wanted a curb to keep in their devotion, rather than a spur to enliven it. Nothing could give them greater concern than to be deprived of this divine food, as St. John Chrysostom says. Hence we read in Church History, that when any of them happened to be separated and kept at a distance from the table of the Lord, until they were better prepared, or, till they performed the penance prescribed by the rigorous discipline of the times, they regretted nothing more bitterly, and deemed no punishment more severe, no misfortune more deplorable. For this reason they were accustomed to implore the mediation of the holy martyrs and confessors, that the time of their penance might be shortened, and to prostrate themselves often at the feet of the pastors of the Church with tears in their eyes, like Esau, when he sued

for the blessing of his father Isaac, humbly praying to be admitted to the sacrament of reconciliation, and to the blessed communion of the body and blood of the Lord, without further delay.

Such was the fervour and devotion of the faithful in the primitive ages of Christianity; but, alas! in process of time, piety beginning to decrease, and charity growing cold, the use of the blessed sacrament became less frequent amongst the generality of their successors. Whilst some religious souls continued still to live up to the zeal of their pious ancestors, and made it their rule to communicate every day, the greater number degenerated from it, and was content at first with weekly communion on every Sunday, and afterwards with quarterly communion on the principal solemnities of the year. One would be apt to imagine that the Church should never have an occasion to exert her authority and denounce her censures, unless to prevent and deter the wicked from approaching this heavenly banquet unworthily; but the faithful, for the most part, became gradually so lukewarm and so careless in frequenting it, that the General Council of Lateran at length found it necessary to issue a formal precept, in order to fix and determine some particular time for them to obey the divine command, lest if they were left to themselves they should entirely neglect so important a duty. The holy time of Easter was assigned and appointed in particular, as the fittest in the whole year for this purpose, the anniversary of the primitive institution of the blessed Eucharist recurring about that time. However, the intention of the Church in thus commanding yearly communion, at or about the solemnity of Easter, is not to authorize the sloth and indolence, or to approve the conduct of such of her children as content themselves with communicating once in the year, but only to hinder them from deferring it any longer. It cannot then be inferred from hence, that annual communion is sufficient to satisfy the duty of a Christian, or to correspond with the views and intention of our Divine Redeemer, in leaving us this heavenly banquet. No, my brethren, the ecclesiastical precept indeed is thereby complied with, provided the communicant receives once a year, with the proper dispositions, at the time and place appointed, but to live up to the spirit of the Christian religion, and to comply with the advice and wishes of the Church, it is necessary to communicate more frequently. Hence it is that the holy Council of Trent in its 22d Session, expresses an ardent desire that all the faithful were in a state to receive the blessed Eucharist, not only spiritually but sacramentally, every time that they assist at the august sacrifice of the mass. Hence it is also that so many indulgences are granted in the course of the year for their greater encouragement, and that spiritual writers so warmly recommend frequent communion, particularly on all the great

solemnities, and on every Sunday, especially on the Sundays of Lent and Advent, and even oftener, according to the fruits it produces and the improvement that is made in virtue, by such as are free from all affection to sin. St. Francis of Sales lays it down as a general rule, for people living in the commerce of the world, that they ought to communicate regularly, at least once a month, and on the principal festivals of the year, if they intend to lead a Christian life. As for these Christians who, in open violation of the law of God and his Church, absent themselves willingly, whole years together from communion, they must acknowledge, if they have not lost their faith along with their piety and devotion, that by turning their backs in this manner to the principal means of grace, and by treating the most holy of the seven sacraments with such inattention, indifference and disrespect, they not only rob their own souls of many special graces, favours and blessings, which otherwise they would receive, but they also make a most ungrateful and irreligious return to Jesus Christ for his inestimable charity, which induced him to contrive this wonderful expedient, and supernatural means of becoming the spiritual food of our souls, and *abiding always with us unto the end of the world*, Mat. c. xxviii. May I not justly say, that this criminal and shameful neglect of the blessed Sacrament proves to several Christians the first step to their spiritual ruin, and the unhappy occasion of being excluded from the eternal banquet of glory, prepared for the elect in the kingdom of Heaven? Like unto the guests that were invited to a great feast, as we read in the gospel of St. Luke, c. xiv. they put off the invitation of their loving Redeemer from month to month, from year to year. They are not at leisure to wait on him. They cannot spare time to correspond with the designs of his mercy. Temporal affairs, trifling amusements, and the fear of interrupting their pleasures and diversions, are counted sufficient obstacles and excuses to exculpate them in their own eyes. Such are the vain frivolous apologies which they allege in their own defence; but the truth is that they are attentive to every thing but their salvation and their improvement in virtue, and that in effect they set a greater esteem on the goods of earth than on the gifts of grace. They absent themselves therefore from the divine banquet, which the Lord, through an effect of his infinite goodness, has vouchsafed to provide for their sanctification. The health of the soul is gradually impaired by being thus deprived of its enlivening nourishment. Its strength is wasted. Its virtue is in a manner starved. Tenderness of conscience is removed. The fear of God is laid aside. Charity grows languid and inactive. The spirit of piety is extinguished. Concupiscence gets the upper hand, and thus the soul at length dies away, and becomes an easy prey to Satan, for want of its spiritual comfort and support. It is not un-

common to hear some people apologize for their neglect of communion, by saying they are not worthy to approach it, and have not the perfection that is requisite. But if they wait until they are worthy, when shall they communicate? Is not a deep sense of our own unworthiness one of the dispositions that are always necessary to a good communion? Is a person to make no approaches to the fire, because he is cold? Is a man to have no recourse to the physician, because he is sick? Two classes of Christians ought to communicate often, as St. Francis of Sales teaches us, in his introduction to a devout life: The perfect and the imperfect, the strong and the feeble, the healthy and the sick. The former because being well disposed, they wrong and prejudice their souls by keeping from the source of all perfection, and by depriving themselves of the signal blessings and manifold graces which are derived from it. The latter ought also to communicate often in order to acquire perfection, to obtain spiritual strength, to improve in the love of God, and to learn to communicate well.

Come then, my brethren, and partake often of this delicious banquet of your Saviour's love. Come to this great supper, and heavenly feast of the spotless Lamb. He calls on you, he invites you, he solicits you, in these affectionate words: *Come to me all you that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.* Come with an ardent desire of being united to him. Come with a spiritual hunger and thirst, like the *wearied heart that panteth after the fountains of waters.* Come with great purity of conscience, clothed with the wedding garment of charity, and the white robe of innocence, free from all the foul stains of mortal sin. Give your hearts entirely to him who gives himself entirely to you in this adorable sacrament. O amiable Jesus, may thy holy name be eternally praised for this wonderful effect of thy love and mercy. Give us grace, we beseech thee, to approach thy sacred table with a devotion suitable to the greatness of thy love. Grant us pardon of our past offences, which we detest from the bottom of our hearts, because they displease thee. Have compassion on our weakness, forgive us our past neglects, and preserve us from future relapses. Enliven our faith, strengthen our hope, inflame our charity, and unite us so closely to thee, that nothing either in life or death may be able to divide or separate us from thee; but that after persevering unto the end in thy love and service, we may have the happiness to enjoy thee hereafter, in the clear vision of eternal bliss, which I wish you all in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

• ON THE FEAST OF ST. PATRICK, APOSTLE OF IRELAND.

Mementote præpositorum Vestrorum, qui vobis locuti sunt Verbum Dei—imitamini fidem—doctrinis variis et peregrinis nolite abduci.

Heb. c. xiii. v. 7 et 9.

Remember your Prelates, who have spoken to you the word of God—whose faith follow—and be not led away by various and strange doctrines.

Heb. c. xiii. v. 7 & 9.

WHEN the Almighty singles out men to be the extraordinary messengers of his councils, oracles of his wisdom, instruments of his grace and channels of his boundless mercies, he confers on them those wonderful gifts, talents and virtues, that are requisite to qualify them for the execution of his orders, and for the accomplishment of the grand designs of his all-ruling providence. Thus he qualified Moses, Aaron and the Prophets in the old Law, and the twelve Apostles in the new Law, for the solemn embassy and the heavenly commission on which he was pleased to send them. He invested them with every power they stood in need of, in order to discharge the duties of their ministry with success; he communicated to them all the eminent gifts and talents that were necessary, to enable them to encounter the difficulties and surmount all the obstacles which stood in their way, and which attended the due execution of the high commission they were charged with. Among many other renowned characters and remarkable instances of this truth, we may justly rank St. Patrick, the glorious Apostle and Patron of Ireland, whose feast the Church solemnizes this day, and honours with the privilege of a plenary indulgence, extended to the faithful of the whole kingdom on every day of the ensuing octave. When the Lord in his great goodness singled him out, for the grand work of the conversion of this remote corner of the then known world to the Christian and Catholic religion, when he sent him as an instrument of his divine mercy to announce the mystery of the cross to our ancestors, and to enlighten a people, who, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, were sitting in darkness and in the gloomy shades of death, he qualified him in every respect for the arduous enterprise, and made him at once a most zealous Apostle and an illustrious Saint, that he might diffuse the light of the Gospel all over this island by his indefatigable zeal, and establish the spirit of the Gospel by his eminent sanctity.

It is under these two considerations that I intend to represent St. Patrick to you at present, as a precious vessel of election and model of Christian perfection. He rooted up infidelity, and planted catholicity in this country; he banished vice and immorality, and promoted the practice of true piety and solid virtue both by his word and example. Behold the plan of the following discourse and the subject of your favourable attention. Let us previously invoke the aid of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The Scripture informs us, that the Saviour of the world retired into a desert, and prepared himself by prayer, and by a rigorous fast of forty days and forty nights, before he entered upon his mission of preaching the Gospel and reclaiming sinners from their evil ways. In like manner, the most authentic histories of St. Patrick's life informs us, that this faithful disciple and follower of Christ our Lord, spent several years in preparing himself by fasting and praying, before he entered upon the sacred functions of the apostolic ministry. That he might preach the Gospel with fruit to others, and draw their souls more effectually to the love and service of God, he first began to preach to himself, to regulate his interior, to cultivate the vineyard of his own soul, and to treasure up lessons of solid piety and true virtue in his mind. Such was the delicacy and tenderness of his conscience, that he accuses himself in his own writings, which are called his *Confession*, that he was rather tardy and remiss in not having begun at an earlier period to love the Lord his God above all things, and with his whole heart, from the very first instant that the use of reason rendered him capable of paying his Creator this tribute, which is so justly due to his Sovereign Majesty on a thousand titles. Hence he tells us, that he could not refrain from weeping for his past neglect; whenever he recollected that his heart had been, even for a single moment, insensible and void of divine love. Herein our saint imitated the piety of the penitent Augustine, who thought that he could never sufficiently bewail and regret every day, every hour, every minute of his past life, which had not been filled up with acts of divine love, and who, in order to clear off the long arrears of love, which, on account of his former neglect, appeared to be still due by him, made it his constant study, ever after, to redouble his love for God all the days of his life, and laboured with indefatigable zeal to kindle flames of divine love in the heart of every Christian, crying out for this reason in the fervour of his soul, O Beauty, ever ancient, and ever new! O Sovereign Good! O inexhaustible Source of all Sweetness and Perfection! Too late, too late, alas! have I begun to love thee. O that I could begin my course over again, that every moment of my life might be filled with tokens and proofs of my love for thee, my God and my All! Behold here an excellent lesson of edi-

fication for all, both young and old. Learn, my brethren, from your glorious patron St. Patrick, that the great precept of charity begins to bind you all at an earlier period than perhaps you imagine. Beware of misplacing your affections on the empty bubbles and painted toys of this transitory life. Look up to Heaven, your native country and happy inheritance, which your dear Redeemer has purchased for you with his precious blood; let your hearts be where God your treasure is, and where he shews his glorious and beautiful Majesty to the Angels and Saints. Begin from this instant, if you have not already begun, to love him above all things, not by word of mouth only; but in reality and truth from the very bottom of your hearts and souls, and endeavour to increase every day in this divine virtue, which is to be the crown, the joy and the happiness of the blessed for a never ending eternity. But to return to St. Patrick. Whilst he was, on a certain day, in the sixteenth year of his age, putting up his fervent prayers to Heaven in a retired place, situated near the borders of the sea, he was surprised by a set of barbarian pirates, who then infested the British coasts, and was suddenly carried off from his family and native country, and brought captive into Ireland, the very land which he was afterwards to deliver from the darkness of infidelity, and from the dismal captivity of Satan. Admire here, my brethren, the wonderful ways of divine Providence! We read in the book of Genesis, that the Patriarch Joseph, by a disposition of Providence, was carried off in his youthful days from his native country, and sold as a slave in Egypt, that he might be the means of relieving the Egyptians afterwards in the hour of distress, and supplying both them and his own father's household with the necessaries of life, during the continuance of a dreadful famine that raged over that land for the space of seven years. By a similar disposition of the same divine Providence, about the decline of the fourth century, the virtuous and pious youth Patrick was stolen away from his parents, carried off and sold as a common slave to a petty prince in the county of Antrim, that by being inured to hardships, and by being well acquainted with the language and manners of the natives of Ireland, he might be better qualified to undertake the great work of their conversion at a future period, and become the happy means of supplying both them and the Churches of his own native country with a sufficient number of zealous clergymen and able missionaries, who would break the heavenly bread of the word of God to the little ones, and nourish their souls with the food of eternal life in the day of their spiritual famine and distress.

Thus it happened that Patrick, whom Heaven had destined to become one day a great pastor of souls in this island, was previously employed in the low and painful servitude of feeding cattle on mountains, and in forests, where he was for a con-

siderable time constantly exposed to the inclemency of the weather, and to all the rigours of poverty, hunger, and nakedness. Far, however, from repining at his despicable situation, far from murmuring, or complaining of the dispensations of Providence, far from flying in the face of God, as numbers of the distressed and suffering poor of our times unhappily do, whereby they not only lose the merit and reward of their trials and afflictions, but likewise expose themselves to the manifest danger of becoming slaves to Satan hereafter in hell, after having been drudges and slaves to sin in this world, Patrick, I say, far from pursuing so criminal a line of conduct, made a virtue of necessity, and carried his cross, and bore his severe trials with patience and resignation, for the love of his blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ. His sufferings of course were to him a source of heavenly benedictions, and served only to furnish him with daily opportunities of practising the virtues of humility, meekness, obedience and submission to the holy will of God. Whilst he thus discharged every exterior duty belonging to his state with cheerfulness, and attended the cattle of his earthly master with the vigilance, assiduity and activity of a faithful servant, his conversation was mostly in Heaven, for he united contemplation with action, and in the midst of his daily employments he took care to elevate his heart frequently to God, by pious aspirations, and short, but devout and fervent prayers. It is related in his life, that he was accustomed to adore God on his bended knees no less than an hundred times in the day and in the night, by which means the love of God continually inflamed his tender heart more and more, and acquired every day new strength in his affectionate soul. It were to be wished, my brethren, that this pious method of attending constantly to the divine presence in the course of the day, and raising up the heart often to God, by some ejaculatory prayer, whilst the hands are employed at daily labour, were more generally adopted by all laborious and industrious Christians in the midst of their ordinary occupations and temporal actions. It is highly recommended by the Saints, and was one of the principal exercises whereby they gradually arrived at the height of perfection. St. Francis of Sales advises us to cast ourselves, in spirit, at the feet of Jesus, like Mary Magdalen, and to give our souls to God a thousand times in the day. To breathe forth some pious ejaculations now and then costs no great trouble, nor does it require much time, or interrupt our external duties; it is short and easy, and does not distract or fatigue the mind; a little practice would render it familiar and habitual, and it has this peculiar advantage, that it can be practised at all times, and on all occasions, without being exposed to the danger of vain glory, as it may be secretly performed in the closet of the heart.

We have already heard what signal advantages St. Patrick derived from fervent and frequent ejaculations of this kind.

No sooner was he released from his bondage but the designs of Providence began to be brought about; for he felt the strongest impressions from Heaven to set about the glorious work of converting the Irish nation without any further delay. Any other motive than the greater honour and glory of God, could never have induced him to undertake so arduous an enterprise, and so difficult a work as the general conversion of an entire nation, where vice was authorized by practice, and impiety strengthened by custom. Palladius, indeed, had preceded him, and was the first who formed the plan of converting this nation to Christianity; but having met with violent opposition, he converted but few, and departed in a short time. The general conversion of Ireland was reserved for St. Patrick, who having travelled into Gaul and Italy for the purpose of acquiring a competent stock of sacred learning, chiefly under the tuition of his uncle, St. Martin, the renowned Bishop of Tours, was promoted to holy orders, and received his episcopal consecration and lawful mission from the successor of St. Peter the Apostle, Pope Celestine, in the year of our Lord 431. He did not intrude himself into the ministry without a true vocation. He did not presume to exercise the sacred functions of the priesthood without being regularly ordained. He did not attempt of his own accord, to dogmatize or turn preacher and teacher without a proper mission, like unto the false prophets in the old Law, who as the Scripture complains, came without being sent, or like unto the new gossellers, and fanatics of these latter ages, who are called by our Saviour *wolves in the clothing of sheep*, and who force themselves into the sheepfold without any mission, either *extraordinary* from God, like that of the Apostles mentioned in c. xvi. of St. Mark, v. 15, or *ordinary* from the pastors of the Church, by the imposition of hands, like that spoken of in c. xiv. of the Acts, and 1 Tim. c. v. v. 22. and 2 Tim. c. i. v. 6. No, my brethren, St. Patrick came to this part of the world duly called, sent and authorized to preach the ancient faith, originally taught by the Apostles, to plant the catholic religion, and to open the fountains of salvation, grace, and mercy to sinners. No sooner did he land at Wicklow, with about twenty fellow labourers, and zealous assistants, but he began to weed, to plant, to water and cultivate the new vineyard of Christ. But how did he compleat his design? He placed his confidence in God, and as he was a man of piety, recollection and prayer, he possessed the art of converting sinners, of softening their hearts, of subduing all the powers of their souls, and of infusing more virtue into them than a more learned man, with all his empty science, and pompous oratory would be able to do; for though a man of extensive knowledge, may argue, convince, and charm others with his eloquence, yet if the spirit of piety be extinguished in his heart, he is no better than a sounding trumpet, though, as St. Paul expresses it, he should speak the language of men and

angels. These maxims were the plan of St. Patrick's conduct, and by these means he had the happiness to gain over innumerable proselytes. He appeared with undaunted courage at the general assembly of the Kings and states of Ireland, which was held every year at Tarah, the residence of the chief King, who was stiled the Monarch of the whole nation. Here our saint met a great number of the Druids, or Heathen priests, and confounded and converted many of them. The shining virtues of his exemplary life were more powerful and more persuasive arguments, than the most elegant discourses. It would be an endless task to enumerate all the labours and fatigues he underwent, in the course of sixty-one years, for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. He travelled through all the provinces of Ireland, rooting up vice, and planting virtue wherever he went. Like another Elias, *he burnt with zeal for the Lord God of Hosts*, 3 Kings, c. xix. v. 10. so that he might truly say with the royal Prophet, ps. lxviii. *The zeal of thy house has eaten me up, and has made me pine away*. Nothing gave him more pain than to see the great God offended; nothing gave him more pleasure than to see him loved, praised and adored. He bewailed the gross errors of idolatry and superstition in which he found thousands of the inhabitants of this country enveloped at the time of his arrival; but glory be to God, his sorrow was soon changed into inexpressible joy. The most obdurate hearts were mollified by his instructions; the greatest sinners cast themselves at his feet, and began to deplore their past crimes with tears of bitterness, and numberless multitudes cried out for Baptism, and embraced the Roman Catholic and Apostolic faith. In short, he dispersed the darkness of infidelity by the brilliant rays of his sanctity, and by the ardour of zeal and piety he made truth and virtue triumph over error and immorality. It is recorded of him that he founded above three hundred churches, ordained near three thousand priests, consecrated a great number of bishops, and established seven hundred religious houses, wherein thousands of the faithful devoted themselves entirely to the divine service, and aspired to the summit of Christian perfection by a regular observance of the three evangelical counsels, insomuch that this island was deservedly stiled the *Island of Saints*, when St. Patrick finished his glorious career in the hundred and twentieth year of his age, and in the four hundred and ninety-third year of our Lord. Nay, during the three succeeding centuries, whilst the greater part of Europe was overspread with inundations of pagan Goths and Vandals, this island was deemed a nursery of piety, a school of virtue, a seminary of learning, and abounded with a long train of illustrious saints, who derived the streams of their sanctity from their great Apostle St. Patrick, and illumined several parts of the continent with the light of the Gospel and the splendor of their virtues. It is true, indeed, that in the ninth century Ireland was in its turn infested by successive

swarms of heathen barbarians, who made it feel the grievances that followed the invasion of the sanctuary, and the demolition of the Roman empire in other countries; but notwithstanding all the various revolutions of nature, the self-same holy Catholic religion, which was planted here by St. Patrick above thirteen hundred years ago, and which was uniformly professed by our pious ancestors ever since, has been carefully transmitted down to us, whole and entire, unchanged and uncorrupted, and is still professed here to this very day in its primitive purity.

Are we not, then, my brethren, highly indebted to the goodness of God for having, in his great mercy, called our ancestors from the darkness of infidelity to the wonderful light of faith, by the ministry of St. Patrick, and for having extended the same heavenly gift to us by the ministry of his successors and descendants, in preference to so many thousands, in other countries, from whom the true faith of Christ has been withdrawn by a just judgment, and transplanted elsewhere. Have we not reason to thank, praise and glorify the holy name of the Lord for this particular blessing, this singular favour, this special protection, and visible interference of his divine providence? Should we not, as the Apostle recommends in the words of my text, gratefully *remember our prelates, who have spoken the word of God to us?* Should we not be steadfast in *following their faith, and taking care not to be led away by various and strange doctrines?* Should we not be armed against all novelty in religion, and guard against the baneful influence of those dangerous principles which the new philosophers and unbelievers of this age are spreading in these and other neighbouring countries? *Remove not the ancient landmark, which your fathers have set,* says the Holy Ghost, Prov. xxii. *Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls,* Jerem. c. vi. v. 16. *Ask thy father and he will shew thee, thy elders and they will tell thee,* Deut. xxxii. *for there is a way that seems to a man to be right, but its end leads to death and perdition,* Prov. c. xiv. v. 12.; and again, Christ cautions us in the Gospel, *to beware of false prophets who make their appearance in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves,* that come, not to feed, but only to fleece and destroy the flock; nay, St. Paul does not hesitate to say, Galat. c. i. v. 8. that although an Angel should descend from Heaven to preach up any new doctrine contrary to the ancient faith once delivered to the saints, we ought to look upon him as an anathema.

Away, then with those irreligious discourses, pernicious maxims, unchristian ideas, unsanctified notions and noxious tares, which the enemy is endeavouring to sow over the good seed. Let us live up to the dictates and duties of our holy religion, and shew the purity of our faith by the purity of our morals, and by a strict observance of the commandments of

God and his Church. Let us not forget the example of our holy Patron, but endeavour to render ourselves worthy of his patronage and intercession, by an imitation of his humility, charity, piety and zeal. Let us enter into the spirit of this holy quarantine, and go through it in a manner becoming good Christians and Catholics. Let us not pervert those days of grace and salvation into days of wrath and perdition. Let us not resemble pagans and bacchanalians in the celebration of our festivals, by criminal excesses and intemperance in drinking. Nothing is more opposite to the spirit of the Gospel, and to the sanctity of this present season and time of mercy, than the odious and destructive vice of drunkenness, by which this day in particular, above all days in the year, is most shamefully profaned. There is no vice that debases or degrades man more from the honour of human nature, or that reduces him nearer to the low rank, condition and similitude of the beasts of the field. It robs him of his reason, which is the greatest prerogative of man, and the most excellent of the gifts of nature. It besots his spirits, clouds his understanding, confuses his judgment, and stupifies his mind in such a manner as not to be able to make one serious reflection, or to distinguish a plain from a precipice, or a friend from an enemy. It renders him a reproach to religion, a disgrace to Christianity, unfit for every spiritual duty, and fit for nothing but for the drudgery of Satan. It should, therefore, be carefully avoided at all times as a brutish vice, but more particularly at present, when the Gospel is crying out loudly to us *to watch and pray, to live soberly, justly and quietly, to crucify the flesh with its lusts, to exhibit our bodies, an immaculate and pleasing host to the Lord, and to look well to ourselves, lest perhaps our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.* Luke, c. xxi. O merciful Jesus, grant us all the grace of a true conversion. Open the eyes of those who are blindly straying away from the path of salvation, and conduct them into the right way that leads to life everlasting. Grant to the just the great gift of final perseverance, that being rescued from the dangers of this sinful Babylon, they may see and enjoy thee for a never-ending eternity, in the sacred mansions of heavenly Jerusalem. Which is the felicity that I wish ye all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

PASSION SUNDAY.

On the advantages of Sufferings and Afflictions.

Tulerunt ergo lapides ut jacerent in eum.—Jo. c. viii. v. 59.

They took up stones to throw at him.—St. John, c. viii. v. 59.

WE enter this day into the time consecrated to the Sufferings and Passion of Jesus Christ, and therefore behold him in the Gospel which the Church proposes to us, exposed to the contradiction, calumnies and contradiction of the Jews, his moral enemies. They openly contradicted the divine truths which he taught them; irreprehensible as he was, they dishonoured him by the grossest injuries, in attributing to him the impiety of Samaritans and the wickedness of the devil; nay, they attempted his life, and if his love for us and the justice of his eternal Father had not reserved him for greater trials, he would then have consummated his sacrifice by sinking under a shower of stones that they took up to throw at him; but he absconded himself from them, until the hour decreed for his passion and death was come. Hence it is, that the pictures and images of the crucifixes in our chapels are veiled, and the bloody standard of the Cross is erected on this day, which is called *Passion Sunday*, the remainder of the Lent being ordained for commemorating the dolorous mystery of Christ's passion, and for mourning for his death, or rather for our sins which were the cause of it, and which like a veil interpose betwixt God and us. What subject more suitable to the time can I then propose to you than that of the Cross, to persuade you to suffer with Christian patience and resignation, the disgraces, the trials, crosses and afflictions that are incident to your respective states, in order to resemble and conform yourselves to Jesus, your Model and Redeemer. But, alas! the generality of Christians, though disciples of a man of sorrows, and children of a crucified God, have an aversion and contempt for the cross; it appears to them an object of folly as to the Pagans, or a subject of scandal as to the Jews. Some, in time of adversity, regard themselves as abandoned by Providence, and give themselves up to sadness and despair; others murmur and repine at their condition, curse their fate and wish themselves dead, and thus lose the merit of their sufferings by their impatience, not considering the manifold advantages and blessings they might otherwise draw from them, both with regard to this and the next

life. For the instruction, consolation, and encouragement both of the one and the other, I shall endeavour to give you a just notion of the sufferings and afflictions of this life, and encourage you at the same time to make a proper use of them. I am far, however, from pretending that you are to divest yourselves of the feelings of human nature, or, like the Stoic philosophers, to affect a stupid insensibility to every thing that is painful to flesh and blood. What I wish to convince you of is, that the sufferings and afflictions of this transitory life are intended as a blessing, and are in reality a most valuable blessing in themselves, as coming from the hands of God. In the first place I will lay before you the advantages of them, and the motives that induce the Almighty to send you such trials. In the second place, I will point out the motives that should induce you to submit to the sufferings and afflictions with which the Almighty is pleased to visit you, and the spirit with which you ought to receive them. Let us previously implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Those who form their judgment of things according to human appearances, and more from the suggestions of self-love than from the rules of the Gospel, look upon sufferings and afflictions in a most unfavourable light. Being accustomed to measure happiness by the maxims of the world, they conclude that all is well when success has crowned their desires, and when they peaceably enjoy all that they love and wish for; on the contrary, they unjustly impeach Heaven, and arraign God's wisdom, when they are visited with trials and adversities, which they look upon as real evils in themselves, and as marks only of God's wrath and indignation; they can scarce believe it to be the work of an all-wise Providence, that some should wallow in opulence and enjoy all kind of worldly comforts, and that others should languish under the severest pressures of indigence, and only feed on the bread of affliction. A Job sitting on a dunghill, and an Achab adored in his palace; a Saint Paul on the scaffold, and a Nero on the throne; innocence oppressed and trodden under foot, whilst vice domineers and iniquity is triumphant, are to them mysteries which they cannot reconcile. But if they took religion for their guide, and viewed the afflictions and sufferings of this life with the eyes of faith, they would be convinced of the justice and advantages of them; they would find that they are often the effects of God's infinite goodness, marks of his favour and clemency, pledges of his love, and seeds of everlasting happiness; they would learn that the trials, adversities and disappointments we meet with here on earth, are a merciful dispensation of the divine bounty, designed by the wisdom and providence of God as means of salvation, either to punish and correct the sinner, or to purify and perfect the just man. Many, indeed, and great are the miseries and calamities that sinners bring on themselves by their

criminal conduct and profligate life; nay, most of the afflictions and misfortunes that attend us in this vale of tears, are the fatal consequences of sin and the just punishment of our own personal iniquities. If some be afflicted, like Jeroboam, either by the loss of substance or by the death of a darling child, it is, perhaps, because they gave him a profane education, or placed in him that love which is only due to the Creator; it is, perhaps, because in their prosperity they were insensible to the wants and deaf to the cries of the poor; it is, perhaps, because they converted the temporal blessings they enjoyed into seeds of everlasting misery, or squandered their superfluities in the pursuit of such worldly pleasures as served only to gratify their ambition. Others are struck with sickness and lingering disorders, perhaps, because when in health they were slaves to voluptuousness, and sacrificed all their desires to the violence of their passions. How many draw down the vengeance of Heaven upon their own criminal heads by their horrible oaths, imprecations and blasphemies? How many bring themselves to public shame, scandal and disgrace, by the irregularity of their lives and the corruption of their morals? How many bring a long series of misfortunes upon themselves and others, by their unjust conspiracies and wicked combinations? How many beggar their families, ruin their constitutions, and riot away their health by drunkenness, and the like criminal excesses? Is it any wonder, then, that all the diseases which follow debauchery, should pour in upon them like a torrent? Is it any wonder that the seasons and elements, nay, the whole creation should rise up against them, conspire their ruin, and sink them to the lowest ebb of misery and indigence? for where such enormous crimes as these prevail without controul, the righteous judgments of the Lord will come upon the land, until it is made a subject of scorn and desolation, as the Scripture says. It is not therefore the treachery of men, the cruelty of enemies, the badness of the times, or the providence of God, that we are to accuse for the miseries and afflictions that surround us. Let us seek no other cause but the corruption of our hearts, and the irregularity of our lives. This is the source of our misfortunes, as the Lord declares by the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel; so that we may truly say, what the children of Jacob formerly said of themselves in their affliction and distress, *It is with justice we suffer these calamities; we have deserved them, because we have sinned against the Lord.*

You will tell me perhaps, that it is a long time since you have renounced your sinful disorders, and entered on the road of salvation, and notwithstanding that you are still afflicted and unhappy. But let me ask you, have you expiated all your past sins, by a sincere and perfect repentance? Have you fully satisfied the divine justice for all the follies and ignorances of your youthful days? Do you know that every sin must be punished here or hereafter, as St. Augustine says, either by

the voluntary penance of man or by the vengeance of an angry God? Are you not then indebted to his infinite goodness for furnishing you with a means to redeem the most exquisite pains and sufferings, that are due to your sins in the next life, by the light and momentary sufferings of this life? Are you not indebted to him for chastising you here in his mercy, and putting you under the happy necessity of discharging the penance, which otherwise you would neglect, and of cancelling, at a small expense the immense debts you owe his divine justice? If now, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, he is pleased to visit you with poverty and sickness, with crosses and afflictions, it is for your correction, amendment, or improvement; it is to give you a favourable opportunity of purifying your soul, of advancing in virtue, of increasing your merit, of practising humility, patience, fortitude and temperance. It is to recall you from your errors to prevent relapses, to exercise your patience, and to fit you for the possession of life everlasting. If he scourges your body, it is to heal the wounds and disorders of your soul, for as Solomon says, *the rod and reproof give wisdom*. If he treats you with a seeming rigour, it is to draw you from the brink of perdition, and to rescue you from the eternal evils and intolerable torments of the next life. If he deprives you of the sweets and comforts of the flattering and deceitful world, it is to keep those things out of your way which he foresees would be the cause of your destruction and everlasting ruin.

You are sensible, my brethren, that riches are generally abused, and made the instrument and support of iniquity. There is nothing more common in the world than for a person to forget God, amidst the tempting allurements, the false joys, and dazzling charms of prosperity. As long as the world smiles on him, every thing that gratifies flesh and blood is easily purchased, and the force of religion is very often overthrown by the violence of passion, which made Christ pronounce a dreadful *wo to the rich*, and declare in the Gospel, *that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven*. The Lord, who desires not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live, takes from this prosperous man the fatal arms the world lent him for his destruction. Through an effect of his mercy he removes the obstacles of his salvation, he lowers his fortune in order to make him reflect on his duty. He permits that he should be publicly disgraced and affronted, that he should be overturned by a lawsuit, that fire should destroy his concerns, or some unexpected accident should interrupt his tranquillity, and put a stop to his avaricious projects, thereby to give him a hearty distaste for the world, to place him in the road of Heaven, to oblige him to forsake the company of those who had so often led him astray, and to sanctify his soul by an humble retreat. This is what God assures us

of by the Prophet Amos, saying, *I have consumed by a burning wind your lands and gardens, I have undermined all your stratagems and designs, in order to force you to return to the ways of salvation.* It was by the like means that the pride of Pharaoh was humbled, and the intolerable arrogance of Nabuchodonosor was pulled down. It was in the horror of a tempest that Jonas confessed his disobedience. Manasses, who had insulted God on his throne, never thought of doing penance until he found himself in the prison of Babylon, humbled under the weight of his chains; nor did the Israelites invoke the protection of Heaven until they felt the galling yoke and fury of the Philistians. It was adversity likewise that brought the brethren of Joseph to an humble confession of their guilt, and that opened the eyes of the prodigal son, and was the happy occasion of reclaiming him from his sinful course. But what need I produce so many examples out of the Scriptures to strengthen this argument, when several among yourselves can testify the same truth by experience? I appeal to your own consciences, how many are there who would never have thought of returning to their duty to God, or of forsaking their darling vices, had not a lingering sickness, the sudden downfall and ruin of their family, or some other intervening accident unsealed their eyes, and discovered to them the folly, vanity and emptiness of all earthly joys, and made them seek that solid happiness above, which this world is not able to afford.

Did you, my brethren, but seriously consider these important truths; did you but reflect with attention on the designs of Heaven in sending you crosses, sufferings and afflictions, you would discover such solid motives of comfort as would be sufficient to silence your murmurs; to put a stop to your discontent, and induce you to embrace your trials, not only with patience, but even with pleasure and joy, let them be ever so painful or disagreeable to your weak nature. You would bless the merciful hand that wounds you in order to heal you, and thank that bounteous Father who chastises you because he loves you; you would bow down to his holy will, and say with the royal Prophet, ps. c. xviii. *It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, O Lord.* Instead of arraigning Providence; instead of flying in the face of God, and exclaiming against Heaven; instead of being dejected, and giving way to melancholy and sadness; instead of complaining that you are severely dealt with; instead of breaking out into murmurs and blasphemies, which cannot assuage your pains, redress your grievances, or restrain God's vengeance, but rather redouble your misfortunes, and make your misery become more sensible, you would look upon your afflictions as blessings of Heaven, and embrace them as a grace, a benevolence, and overflowing of divine mercy. You would regard them as the just punishment of your sins, a sovereign remedy for your disorders, and a powerful means of salvation. You would receive them with a due

submission from God's holy hand, as tokens of his clemency. You would thank his goodness, for vouchsafing to accept of them as a penance for your manifold offences, and as a retaliation for the terrible chastisements you would be obliged to undergo in the next world. You would endeavour to make a virtue of necessity, and bear with Christian patience, the accidents and disgraces of the world, the reverses of fortune, the sickness and disorders with which you are visited, and offer them with great humility to the Lord, in satisfaction for your transgressions, and in conjunction with the sufferings of Jesus Christ. If your reputation should happen to be tarnished by atrocious detractions and black calumnies, you would imitate King David, who patiently bore the maledictions of Semei, that they might prove to him a source of benedictions and graces. If you should happen to be distressed by unjust lawsuits, or to be otherwise injured, abused, reviled or persecuted, you would acknowledge with holy Job, that it is the hand of the Lord that strikes you, and that your enemies are only the instruments of his divine justice. However bitter the chalice of your sufferings may appear, you would say with your Blessed Redeemer, *shall I not drink the chalice which my Heavenly Father has given me?* This, my brethren, is the use we should make of our sufferings and afflictions. This is our duty as Christians, and disciples of a Master, who has recommended nothing more earnestly to us than the obligation of carrying our cross, and who has given us in his own person a most perfect model of patience. But alas! how different from this is your conduct? Instead of respecting the rod in the hands of a charitable Father, do you not break it like a rebellious child, or rather do you not, like a senseless and furious animal, as St. Augustine speaks, bite and bark at the stone that strikes you, without considering who it is that throws it? Instead of submitting to the low condition in which Divine Providence has thought proper and expedient to place you, instead of acquiescing to the decrees of Heaven, and bearing the difficulties of your state in the spirit of humility and penance, do you not envy the prosperity of others? are you not jealous of their imaginary happiness? do you not frequently break out into murmurs and complaints? do you not burst into bitter invectives upon the least insult that is offered to you? do you not retaliate injuries, and discharge a dreadful volley of oaths and curses against your neighbour upon the least contradiction you meet with? Thus, by your impatience, you become martyrs without merit or reward, and besides losing the benefit and fruits of your sufferings, you run the risk of being miserable in both worlds, and of becoming slaves to Satan in flames for a never-ending eternity. Thus, in a word, you frustrate the designs of God's mercy, who has marked out no other road for conducting his servants to everlasting happiness but the royal way of the cross, and who tries the hearts of

men in the furnace of adversity as silver is tried by the fire, and gold in the furnace.

If we consult the Scriptures, almost every page will declare that crosses are the portion and inheritance of God's faithful servants, and that the just have been tried by sufferings and afflictions in all ages since the beginning of the world, adversity being the touchstone on which true virtue is tried and distinguished from what is only counterfeit. Abel was sacrificed by the fury of his brother. Jacob was in slavery with Laban. Joseph was sold by his brethren. The Hebrews were for a long time in the bondage of Pharaoh. Holy Job from being the most opulent Prince in the East, was reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, stripped of all his possessions, covered all over with sores and ulcers, insulted and abandoned by his friends, and at length turned out of doors, and like an abortive thrown upon a dunghill. Tobias, that model of charity, and great servant of God, was deprived of the sight of both his eyes, and persecuted by his own wife and family. *Because he was acceptable to God, as the Angel Raphael told him, it was necessary that affliction should try him.* St. John the Baptist was undoubtedly a child of Providence, a darling of Heaven, and a particular favourite of our Blessed Redeemer, and yet he was cast into prison and loaded with irons, his sacred head was cut off and brought upon a dish to Herod's table, whilst that monster of impiety wallowed in pleasures, feasted sumptuously in the midst of a brilliant court, and wantoned in all the luxurious affluence of wealth. In like manner poor Lazarus was covered with ulcers, and pining away with hunger, whilst the rich epicure enjoyed all the comforts of life. But when Lazarus died, his soul was carried by Angels into Abraham's bosom, whilst on the contrary the rich man was buried in hell. The one was comforted, the other tormented, *because one had received good things in his life time, and the other evil things,* Luke, c. xvi. So true it is, my brethren, that sufferings and afflictions are the usual marks whereby the Lord distinguishes his best friends and greatest favourites in this world. These are the most undoubted pledges of his love, and it is hereby he shews that he has not utterly cast us off as our sins have deserved. Other fathers spare and indulge their children, but as St. Paul assures us, Heb. c. xii. *whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* Jesus Christ himself was not exempted. It was necessary *he should first suffer and so enter into glory.* He suffered, says St. Peter, 1 Ep. e. ii. v. 21. *leaving us an example that we may follow his footsteps.* Like a tender hearted physician, he vouchsafed to drink first himself of the chalice of afflictions, and to sweeten it with a touch of his sacred lips, as St. Augustine speaks, that sick mortals, animated by his example, should not refuse the medicine which he prescribed as a powerful expedient for healing their spiritual disorders, and purifying their souls. Hence, when the

mother of the two disciples, James and John, requested that they might be placed one at his right hand, the other at his left hand in his kingdom, he asked them if they were able to drink of his chalice, giving them thereby to understand that patience and resignation were the essential qualifications of his disciples, and that preferments in his kingdom were only attainable by trials and sufferings.

This was the road by which his blessed Apostles entered into the glory of Heaven; they drank large draughts of the bitter cup of affliction, and *rejoiced and were exceedingly glad* in their sufferings and tribulations, according to the instructions they had received from their divine Master, Luke, c. vi. v. 33. They carried their cross cheerfully after him, and gloried in bearing some resemblance of his sufferings and mortifications, and in being made conformable to his image, as St. Paul speaks, Rom. c. viii. v. 29, for they knew that this was the character of the elect, and the only way to eternal happiness, which made the Apostle say, that *by many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God*, Acts, c. xiv. v. 21. This holy spirit of suffering with pleasure and joy, was not confined to the Apostles, but extended itself to thousands of the faithful in the primitive ages of Christianity. They embraced all kind of trials, sufferings and torments, not only with patience and resignation to the will of God, but also with transports of joy, because they were convinced that what they suffered bore no proportion with the incomprehensible joys that are reserved in Heaven for the faithful servants of God, after the afflictions and sufferings of this mortal life, according to these words of the Apostle: *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed hereafter, for a moment of light tribulation worketh, above measure an eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. c. iv. v. 17. The hope of receiving so ample a recompence sweetened all the sufferings and afflictions of the holy martyrs, and bathed their souls in a torrent of delights, whilst their bodies streamed with blood, and smarted under the stripes that were inflicted by their cruel tormentors. It was the same blessed hope also that encouraged holy Job to bear his afflictions with wonderful patience, and to return thanks to the Lord for the great trials he had to encounter, saying, *The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, may the name of the Lord be blessed*. Job. c. i. v. 21. It was it that made Tobias cry out to Heaven, and say, *I bless thee, O Lord God of Israel, because thou hast chastised me*. It was it that replenished the Machabees with spiritual joy and consolation in the midst of their most excruciating torments. It was it, in fine, that animated the three Hebrew children to walk through the flames of the fiery furnace of Babylon, singing a canticle of joy and thanksgiving, and inviting Heaven and earth, the Angels, the elements, and all creatures in the universe to join them in bless-

ing, praising and magnifying the Lord for ever and ever. How happy would you be, my brethren, who lead a painful and laborious life, and who undergo so many hardships and distresses in the state wherein Providence has been pleased to place you, if you took care to follow those examples as far as human weakness will permit, and to sanctify the sufferings and afflictions you daily meet with by patience, resignation, and a perfect submission to the will of God? what treasures of merit would you not thereby amass for your souls? what an increase of glory would you not be entitled to? every cross would become tolerably light and easy to you here, and Heaven would be your everlasting inheritance hereafter. Learn then to be contented and satisfied in your state, and acknowledge with gratitude the mercy of God, who has rescued you from the many dangers to which prosperity, and a life of ease and pleasure would expose you. Bow down with submission to the appointments of Divine Providence, receive sickness, adversity, and every other trial you are visited with, as coming from the holy hand of God, and designed for your good. O merciful Jesus, thou perfect model of all suffering and afflicted Christians, enable us to bear up against the feelings and reluctance of our corrupt nature, and to carry our cross cheerfully after thee. Have compassion on our frailty, and support our weakness, that we may not sink under the weight of those sufferings which thou art pleased to send us, or frustrate the designs of thy mercy by our impatience and want of resignation. Pardon our past feelings, and grant that in future we may look upon the trials and afflictions of this life as a merciful dispensation of thy divine bounty, and that we may willingly accept of them in the spirit of humility and penance. Give us grace to say from the bottom of our hearts, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*, for it is by doing thy will, and not our own, that we may confidently hope to attain the happy end of our creation, and to be admitted hereafter, through thy infinite merits, into the kingdom of eternal glory, which thou hast purchased for us by the effusion of thy precious blood, and which I, my brethren, wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, *Amen*.

PALM SUNDAY.

On the Dispositions required to a worthy Pascal Communion.

Ecce Rex tuus Venit tibi mansuetus—Mat. c. xxi. v. 5.

Behold thy King cometh to thee with meekness.—Mat. c. xxi. v. 5.

THE Gospel of this day relates the triumphant entry of our blessed Saviour into the city of Jerusalem amidst the loud

acclamations of a vast confluence of people that accompanied him, carrying branches of palms and boughs of olive in their hands, and singing with raptures of joy pious *hosannas to the son of David*. It is in honour and imitation hereof that a solemn procession is held on this day in Catholic countries, the faithful assisting thereat, and carrying branches of blessed palm in their hands, as emblems of that glorious victory which our heavenly King gained over sin and death, and by which he threw open the gates of Heaven to the banished children of Eve. In all probability the multitude that accompanied him at the time of his entry into Jerusalem was composed chiefly of poor country people from the neighbouring villages and cottages; for we scarce find that any persons of note or distinction applied to him for instruction, except Nicodemus, who came to him in private, and the rich young man, who soon forsook him when he was ordered to sell all his worldly possessions and distribute the produce of them to the poor. The poor seem to have been the usual attendants and the favourite companions of our Divine Redeemer. A few poor shepherds were the first that welcomed him into the world, and adored him. A poor carpenter was his guardian, and entertained him in his house. Poor fishermen attended him in his mission, and a crowd of poor women followed him to Mount Calvary to the foot of the cross. Hence it appears that the poor are more attached to the service of God, and bid fairer for the kingdom of Heaven than the rich, and therefore that their state is not so thoroughly miserable as the world imagines, nor is the state of the rich so truly happy, or so much to be envied. The poor meet with so many favourable opportunities to sanctify their souls, and to merit a happy eternity, by submitting with patience and resignation to the trials and sufferings of this transitory life, that the Gospel expressly says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*. On the contrary, the rich are surrounded with so many snares, and exposed to so many dangerous temptations, that the Gospel pronounces a dreadful *wo to the rich*, and declares that it is harder for them to enter the kingdom of Heaven, than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. It may appear somewhat surprising, that our Blessed Saviour would admit of so much outward pomp and solemnity upon making his entry into Jerusalem, especially if we consider that he always declined temporal honours, and shewed so great a contempt for worldly grandeur, that he declared his *kingdom was not of this world*, and that he fled to a mountain to hide himself when the multitude, which he had fed in the desert with five barley loaves and two small fishes, intended to proclaim him their king. But his reason for admitting the innocent triumph of Palm Sunday was, that he might fulfil the prophecies, and let us see at the same time, with what pleasure and alacrity he was going to Jerusalem to lay down his life for the redemption

of mankind.—Jerusalem was to be the bloody theatre of his passion in a few days after; he therefore entered it in triumph, to denote the pressing desire he was actuated with to undertake and accomplish that great work of his boundless charity. The honour and respect which his faithful disciples and friends paid him at his entry into Jerusalem, point out to us the dispositions with which we ought to receive him in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist at the approaching solemnity of Easter, and afford me a favourable opportunity to lay before you the necessary conditions of a worthy Paschal Communion, and the crying malice and enormity of an unworthy or sacrilegious Communion. Let us first humbly implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, *Ave Maria*.

Two great disorders reign at present in Christianity, with regard to the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is shamefully neglected by some, and presumptuously received by others, by which means it unhappily happens that this most precious treasure, and most excellent gift of Heaven, becomes useless to the one, and proves fatal to the other.—The former, by slighting it, deprive their own souls of the manifold graces and blessings which they would derive from a worthy communion. The latter defile their souls where they should purify them, and incur death in eating the food of life, because they do not discern it from common food, but rashly approach the table of the Lord without having previously tried themselves, according to the directions of the Apostle. Thus both the one and the other reap no benefit from this august mystery, but defeat the views and merciful designs of the Saviour of the world, and obstruct, by their evil dispositions, the virtue and wonderful effects that the spiritual food of the soul would otherwise operate in it, much after the same manner that the virtue of corporal food is often obstructed by the indisposition of those who partake of it.

In order to remedy these evils, the Catholic Church, assembled in the general council of Lateran, has commanded the faithful, under pain of incurring the guilt of mortal sin, and of being liable to an excommunication, to receive the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist with the necessary dispositions, at least once a year. This precept of annual communion is grounded upon a divine precept of Christ himself, and the particular time that the Church has determined and fixed for complying with it, is the holy time of Easter or thereabouts, as being the fittest and most proper time in the whole year; because it was then, on the very eve of his passion and death, that our Divine Redeemer first established this precious monument of his boundless charity, and bequeathed to his church this inestimable legacy of his own sacred body and blood, in the form of a banquet, under the two different species or outward appearances of bread and wine, for bread and

wine being most nourishing to the body, were the most proper to represent the grace of this sacrament, and to denote that it was instituted in order to serve as a continual banquet for the spiritual comfort and nourishment of the souls of the faithful unto the very end of the world. To participate worthily of this heavenly banquet should be the grand object and wish of every Christian. There is no religious duty of greater consequence, or more conducive to our happiness, both here and hereafter, as on the contrary there can be no greater misfortune than to partake of it unworthily, or in a state of mortal sin. It is evident that neither the divine nor the ecclesiastical precept can be fulfilled by an unworthy or sacrilegious communion. To prevent so dreadful an evil, we are to search our conscience diligently, and make the best preparation we can before we venture to approach the sacred table of Jesus Christ. All the fruit and benefit we can hope to receive, depend on the preparation we make, and on the dispositions with which we communicate. The more diligently and devoutly we prepare and dispose our souls, the more graces and the greater blessings we have a right to expect. The conduct of the pious multitude, mentioned in this day's Gospel, is a model and pattern worthy of our attention and imitation. The innocent triumph which they prepared for the entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, is to be considered as a figure and representation of his entrance into the soul of a Christian by a worthy Easter communion. The honour and respect they paid him, and the welcome reception which they gave him on this occasion, shew us also in what manner, and with what dispositions we ought to receive him at this holy time in the blessed Sacrament. In the first place they were his faithful disciples and real friends who received him triumphantly into the aforesaid city, and treated him with due respect; hereby we are taught that it is necessary to be of the number of his true friends and disciples, in order to be qualified to receive him worthily in the holy communion. Whosoever, therefore, has had the misfortune to lose the grace of God, and to become his enemy by mortal sin, must previously recover his love and friendship by a sincere repentance, before he ventures to approach the blessed Sacrament. Like unto the Hebrew children mentioned in the Gospel, he must go out of Jerusalem; he must quit the dangerous places, wicked company, and other occasions whereby he forfeited his innocence. He must meet the King of Meekness with a clean heart, with an ardent desire and a pure intention of being united to him. He must, like the pious multitude, present him with branches of palm and boughs of olive, that is to say, he must gain a victory over his favourite vices and darling passions. He must use his best endeavours to conquer inordinate pride and self-love, and to be reinstated in that happy peace which the Holy Ghost produces in the soul that he in-

habits. The boughs of olive and branches of palm are emblems and symbols of of this peace, and trophies of the victory that is to be obtained before he is admitted to partake of the heavenly banquet of Jesus Christ.

The pious multitude also stripped off their garments, and spread them on the way that our Lord was to pass over. They covered it with green boughs, and ornamented it as decently as they could, singing at the same time canticles of joy, praise, and thanksgiving in honour of the King of Israel, who came with sweetness and meekness to visit them. Their conduct instructs us, that in order to render ourselves worthy to receive a visit from Christ our Lord, and to be qualified for partaking of the signal blessings and graces with which he comes to enrich our souls in the holy communion, we must be prepared to receive him with profound respect, veneration, and humility. We must throw off the old man and clothe ourselves in the new. We must cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. We must divest ourselves of our evil habits, and trample upon the tempting allurements and sinful vanities of the world. We must embellish and adorn our souls with the christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and from the bottom of our hearts breathe forth fervent and devout acts of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. We must, as St. Augustine says, bring innocence with us to the altar of God, and be clothed with the nuptial robe and wedding garment of charity and sanctifying grace, that we may not deserve to be treated like the unhappy guest mentioned in St. Mathew, c. xxii. who was tied hands and feet and cast into exterior darkness, because he thrust himself into the wedding supper without the wedding garment. Our blessed Saviour himself, by washing the feet of his disciples at his last supper, before he administered to them the adorable sacrament of his body and blood, has given us sufficiently to understand what great purity both of soul and body he requires in those who are to sit at his table, and to partake of his divine banquet. Let no one, therefore, who is in the habit or affection of mortal sin attempt to present himself. Let no Judas, no scandalous sinner approach. Pearls are not to be cast before swine, nor is the bread of children and the food of angels to be shared with dogs, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, Matt. xv. that is to say, with those who are wallowing in the mire of iniquity, and constantly relapsing and returning like dogs to their vomit. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily*, says St. Paul, *eateth and drinketh judgment to himself*. He is guilty of a sacrilege of the blackest dye, that deserves the thunderbolts of divine vengeance. St. Augustine compares the unworthy communicant to Judas the traitor, who with a kiss delivered Jesus Christ to his enemies. St. John Chrysostom says, that he resembles the executioners on Mount Calvary, who nailed him to the Cross, and really put him to death. Wo be to that man by whom the Son of

God is thus betrayed and re-crucified! If sacrilege of any kind whatever, even the lowest degree, be so offensive and so hateful in the sight of God, that he has been often provoked to punish it most severely even in this life, as appears from the many visible judgments which, according to the Scriptures, have been inflicted on the profaners of the Ark of the Covenant, the victims, sacrifices and sacred vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem, what an odious and enormous crime must it be, and how outrageously provoking and injurious to God, to profane the most adorable sacrament of the Eucharist, and abuse what is most holy in religion by a sacrilegious communion? Nothing hardens the heart of a sinner more, or paves the way sooner to apostacy and irreligion, as is evident in unhappy Judas, who should be the terror, as he was the first example of an unworthy communicant. They who, under the mask of piety; and the outward appearance of devotion, presume to communicate unworthily, copy after this apostate, and betray their Lord and Master with the signal of a kiss. Good Christians, says St. John Chrysostom, are conducted to the blessed sacrament by the light of Heaven, as the three wise men of the East were conducted to the stable of Bethlehem by a star. But they who receive unworthily are led on by the evil spirit, as the wicked and treacherous king Herod was, when under the specious pretence of paying homage to our newly born Redeemer, he only sought an opportunity to take away his life.

Beware, my dear brethren, of ever defiling your souls with a sacrilege of so horrid a nature, and so black a dye. Beware of receiving the God of sanctity, the God of Charity, the God of purity, into a soul polluted with iniquity; a breast heaving with hatred and malice against your neighbour, or an heart full of pride, black with envy, or burning with criminal desires and impure love. Beware, I say, of such impiety, but at the same time beware also of falling into the opposite extreme, and absenting yourselves from the spring of life, and the fountain of grace. Remember, that the sacrament of Christ's body and blood is necessary for the preservation of the spiritual life of your souls, as corporal food is necessary for the preservation of the life of your bodies. Christ himself declares, St. John, c. vi. *unless you eat his flesh and drink his blood, ye shall have no life in you.* A soul that is dead by mortal sin, can receive no benefit from this spiritual food; as a dead body can receive no nourishment from corporal food; moreover, as the very same corporal food, which nourishes a healthy man, may overwhelm and hasten the death of a sick man, so in like manner this heavenly and divine food, which gives life to the good, brings death to the wicked, who are pushed on by a criminal temerity to receive it whilst they are unhappily involved in the state and affection of grievous sins.

O let me then exhort you, my brethren, to hasten to the throne of mercy without further delay, and like the prodigal son, to return to the loving embraces of your heavenly Father. Enter into the spirit of the Church, and of this penitential season, and prepare a fit habitation in your souls for the reception of Jesus Christ; cleanse and purify your hearts, and wash away all the foul stains of your sins in the salutary waters of penance, that ye may share in the blessings of this holy time, and experience the manifold advantages and happy fruits of a worthy communion.

O amiable Redeemer, since in thy great mercy thou hast vouchsafed to provide this delicious banquet for our spiritual nourishment, give us grace to have frequent recourse to it with the necessary dispositions. Imprint in our souls a just abhorrence of an unworthy and sacrilegious communion, and make us truly sensible of the salutary effects of a devout and worthy communion. Enliven our faith, and excite in us an ardent desire to receive this great sacrament of thy love frequently, during the course of our mortal pilgrimage, but particularly at the hour of our death, that it may fortify us against the assaults of the enemy, and serve us as a viatic to a blessed eternity; which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

HOLY THURSDAY.

*On the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament of the
Eucharist, and the Real Presence, &c.*

Cum dilexisset suos, qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.

Jo. c. xiii. v. 1.

When Jesus had loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
St. John, c. xiii. v. 1.

IT was not enough for our divine Redeemer to make us his adopted children in the sacrament of Baptism, and to replenish us with the gifts of the Holy Ghost in the sacrament of Confirmation, but he was likewise most graciously pleased to provide an heavenly banquet in the sacrament of the Eucharist, for the spiritual comfort and nourishment of our souls. His love for mankind knew no bounds, but carried him beyond the very farthest limits of love. He loved us as a God, multiplying

his benefits, and giving us still stronger proofs, and more signal tests of his love, as he drew nearer to the end of his mortal life. Hence the beloved disciple St. John, soaring above the other Evangelists, and penetrating into the divine sanctuary of our Lord's breast, in order to discover the infinite charity with which he was inflamed, tells us, in a short introduction to his account of the last supper, that Jesus knowing *that his hour was come when he was to pass out of the world to his eternal Father*, out of that love which he always bore, and which he continued to bear us to the end, bequeathed unto us this truly divine and inestimable legacy of his love. *When he loved his own, who were in the world*, says the Evangelist, *he loved them to the end*, not merely to the end of his mortal life, but even beyond his life, to the end of the world, to the end and consummation of ages, and beyond the farthest bounds of love.

His love for us called him to Heaven, that he might prepare a place for us there, and perfect the work of our sanctification, by sending down the Holy Ghost; and the same boundless love engaged him to institute the blessed Eucharist, that it might serve unto the end of the world as a continual banquet in his church, a perpetual memorial of his sacred passion, and an earnest of our future happiness. In this adorable mystery his charity exerted itself in such a wonderful manner as to seem to cast forth all its flames. To redeem mankind he humbled himself to the death of the cross, (a mode of redemption which the most sublime created intelligence could never have devised) and he would still farther astonish the world by the institution of this Sacrament. Herein, says the Council of Trent, Sess. 12, he has in a manner poured out the riches of his love, and displayed the most signal effects of his mercy in our favour. Herein, says St. Thomas of Aquin, we have an abridgment of all his wonders, and a standing monument of all his prodigies. Herein his goodness seems to have outdone itself, and to have, as it were, exhausted the treasures of his wisdom and power; for every thing that is good and precious is here concentrated. In short, he has given us, in the blessed Eucharist, the most valuable treasure that Heaven was able to bestow, and that the earth was able to receive; since, as St. Augustine observes, God's wisdom could not contrive, nor could his power produce, nor could his liberality bestow us any thing greater or more valuable than his own self. St. Paul, speaking of this most holy Sacrament, calls it *the Lord's Supper*, because it was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ on the very eve of his passion and death, when he eat the Paschal Lamb for the last time with his disciples in the city of Jerusalem. Then it was that he made his last will and testament, and vouchsafed to realize in the new law the gifts that were only figurative in the old law, that he might thus unite himself most intimately with us, abide in us by the strongest alliance, animate us by his divine spirit, and furnish us with a most powerful means of grace and spiri-

tual strength during the time of our mortal pilgrimage here on earth. As the anniversary of the primitive institution and first establishment of this inestimable pledge and monument of his love occurs this day, I intend to lay before you the principal circumstances of this ever memorable transaction, in order to strengthen your faith, enliven your piety, and inflame your devotion. And as it is expedient that you should be acquainted with the grounds of your religion, and know on what a solid foundation your belief rests, I will, with the divine assistance, produce some of the many proofs, which plainly shew that as our most merciful Lord assumed at his incarnation a real flesh and real blood, and not a figurative flesh and blood, so in like manner he gives us really, and not figuratively, this same flesh and blood in the blessed Eucharist. Before we proceed, let us implore the intercession of his most holy mother, greeting her in the words of the Angel Gabriel, *Ave Maria*.

Christ our Lord having reserved for the end of his life the greatest effects of his love, had so pressing a desire to institute the blessed Eucharist before his visible departure out of this world, that he unbosomed himself to his disciples at his last Supper in these affectionate words: *with longing*, said he, *have I desired to eat this Passover*, or Paschal Lamb, *with you*; not that he had any longing or craving desire for the flesh of the Lamb, which he had eaten with them several times before, but because it was a figure and type of the heavenly banquet which he intended to substitute then in its place, and in which he designed to present them with the substance and truth instead of the shadow, and to feed their souls with his own sacred flesh, as being the immaculate Lamb of God that came to take away the sins of the world. This great design he put in execution in a manner worthy of himself; for as the ancient Jews did not in spirit only unite themselves to the victims which were offered for them in the Old Law, but in reality eat of the sacrificed flesh, that the real eating of it might serve them as a mark and testimony of their partaking of the oblation that was made for them; so in like manner Jesus Christ, becoming himself the victim of our redemption, would have Christians in the New Law also really eat of the flesh of his sacrifice, to the end that the actual communication of his sacred flesh might be a perpetual remembrance and testimony to every one of us in particular, that it was for our sake he took it, and for us it was immolated on the cross. However, to exercise our faith in this mystery, and to free us at the same time from the natural horror of eating his flesh and drinking his blood in their own proper species and natural form, his infinite wisdom was pleased to contrive a wonderful means, whereby he gives us his real flesh and blood, to be received whole and entire, united inseparably with his Soul and Divinity, and veiled under another species and form. Had he given his flesh and blood to be received visibly in the blessed Eucharist,

according to his natural way of existence, or in the manner that his body existed whilst he lived here on earth, it would not be a Sacrament, a veil, or a mystery, and we should no longer have faith, but rather would be filled with terror and horror; he therefore chose to give himself to us in a supernatural manner, and in a way more agreeable to our senses, hidden and veiled in a sacrament in form of a banquet, under the visible signs and outward appearances of bread and wine; for as bread and wine are most nourishing to the body, they were the most proper elements and symbols to represent a spiritual banquet, and to signify the effects and the grace of this sacrament, which serves to nourish the soul and to strengthen the spiritual life that we receive in baptism. Hence it is that our blessed Redeemer, who is stiled in the Scripture, *our High Priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedech*, was pleased to choose bread and wine for the remote matter of the Eucharist. We behold here the outward appearances of bread and wine after the consecration the same as before, for the exercise of our faith, but the inward substance of bread and wine subsists no more, it being changed by the consecration into the substance of Christ's blessed body and blood, which is here truly, really, and entirely contained under each of the sacramental species; and that this most precious pledge of his love might remain with us, and be transmitted to the latest posterity, he ordained his Apostles priests of the New Law, and empowered them, and their lawful successors in the ministry, to do in his name and by his authority what he himself did at his last supper; that is, to consecrate bread and wine into the Sacrament of his real body and blood. This power is exercised in the sacrifice of the Mass, Christ himself concurring with the consecrating priest to produce his sacred body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist as he concurs with the officiating priest to produce effects of grace, and to give the Holy Ghost in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. The real presence of his body and blood in the Eucharist may be demonstrated from the plain and unequivocal terms of his last will and testament, wherein he bequeathed this precious legacy to his children, and actually fulfilled the promise he had made in c. vi. of St. John. Nothing can be more clear or more expressive than his words; they are recorded by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Paul. In all these places Christ himself, who is incapable of an untruth, assures us in as strong terms as words could possibly express, that what he gives us in the blessed Eucharist is the very self same *body that was given and delivered for us*, and the very self same *blood that was shed for the remission of our sins*, and consequently his real body and blood. For having celebrated the Passover, and washed the feet of his Apostles with his own hands, in token of that purity with which they should receive the sacrament he was then going to institute, the Evangelists inform us that he took

bread, and raising his eyes to Heaven, gave thanks to his Father. Then he blessed it, broke it, gave it to his Disciples, and in the simple language of Omnipotence, with which he called forth the world from nothing, and commanded the Heavens to be, and the light to shine, he said, *This is my body*; and in like manner taking the chalice, he said, *This is my blood*. He did not say, *In this, or with this is my body and blood*; nor did he say, *This is a figure of my body, This is a figure of my blood*; but he said, *This is my body, which is given for you, and This my blood, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins*; which words cannot be verified but by a true and substantial presence of his real body and blood; for it would be false and grossly absurd to declare that it was a figure of his body that was given and sacrificed for us, or a figure of his blood that was shed for the remission of sins, or that bread was his body, and wine his blood, without making any change in them.

Had Christ said, *This is not my body, This is not my blood*, every one would conclude that neither his body nor his blood was present in the sacrament, because these words, taken in the natural obvious sense would convey no other idea. And shall not the words, *This is my body, This is my blood*, which he actually made use of, have equal force to prove that his body and blood are truly and really present in the blessed sacrament? If we consider all the circumstances in which he then spoke, we shall find that he had every reason to speak in a clear, intelligible manner, and that his words are not to be wrested with violence from their plain and literal meaning, to unparalleled metaphors, or obscure, ambiguous and equivocal tropes and figures, contrary to all the rules of speech. He was then alone with his twelve Apostles and bosom friends, to whom he was accustomed to expound in clear terms whatever was allegorical or obscure in his parables and other discourses to the multitude, as we read, Mark c. iv. v. 34. He was taking his last farewell of them, and speaking not in parables and similitudes, but in the most affectionate and familiar manner; he was instituting the greatest of all his sacraments; he was making a covenant, which was to last to the end of the world; he was enacting a law to be observed for ever in his Church; he was, in fine, making his last will and testament. It cannot, therefore, be supposed that on such important occasions, and in such circumstances, he would act contrary to the practice of all wise testators, break through all the usual laws of speech, and deliver himself in ambiguous expressions, that might lead his children into a pernicious error concerning the legacy which he left to them. He undoubtedly foresaw that his Church would understand his words in their plain, obvious and literal sense, which he would have wisely prevented, in a matter of such importance, had he not really meant what he so expressly said, or had he intended that his words should be interpreted in a figurative

sense. Hence we read that the blessed Eucharist has been, since the infancy of the Church, the comfort, and the continual object of the devotion of the primitive Christians. They *were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread*, Acts, c. ii. v. 42. that is, in the participation of the holy mysteries of the Eucharist. *Is not*, says St. Paul *the chalice which we bless, the communion of the blood of Christ? And is not the bread which we break, the participation of his body?*

This truth may be likewise demonstrated from chapter vi. of St. John, where our blessed Saviour, after feeding a multitude of about five-thousand persons with five small loaves which he had miraculously multiplied, passes from the figure to the substance, and speaks of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, before its institution, in such strong and clear terms, that he could not possibly exclude a figure more expressly than he did; for he promised them in the most solemn manner, that the bread which he would give us in the Eucharist, is the very same flesh which he would give for the life of the world, and consequently his real flesh, and not a figure of it, as it was his real flesh, and not a bare figure of it, that he gave and delivered for the life and salvation of the world. *The bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world*, v. 52; and again, v. 56, he says, *My flesh is really meat, and my blood is really drink*; which would not be true if his flesh was not really eaten, and if his blood was not really drank in the Sacrament, since nothing can be really meat, nor really drink, that is not, or that cannot be really eaten nor really drank. It cannot be supposed that our Blessed Saviour broke his word, or that he was unfaithful to his promise; for, as his power is indisputable, so his veracity is unquestionable; he therefore gives us in the Eucharist his real flesh and blood, truly and substantially, and not a simple sign or remembrance of it; for if he gave us nothing but a figure or sign instead of the substance and reality, his words would not be verified, and he could no more be said to have fulfilled his promise than a person who promised another a real estate, could be said to fulfil his promise by presenting him only with a figure or map of it upon paper. The Jews of Capharnaum understood the aforesaid words and promise of Christ in their obvious and literal sense, as to the giving his real flesh and blood, and so far they were right; had they not understood his words in this sense, his discourse would not have appeared so harsh and offensive to them as it did, nor would there be any occasion for their debates, murmurs and contentions, if they apprehended that his flesh and blood were to be received in figure or spirit only, or that he only intended to give them material bread to eat, as they might have easily conceived this without asking each other, *How can this be? How can he give us his flesh to eat?* They were, indeed, mistaken as to the manner of receiving it, and had no idea of his giving

his flesh and blood to be received, whole and entire, in an unbloody and invisible manner, veiled in a sacrament under other forms. They erroneously understood this mystery in a gross carnal sense, and imagined that Christ meant to give him his dead flesh to eat in its own natural state and form, and to make them drink his blood in its own proper species, according to the usual manner of taking common meat and drink by way of corporal nourishment. It was this that shocked and scandalized them, and for this reason Christ our Lord took care to correct this mistaken notion and gross apprehension; but he found no fault with them for having understood his words in their obvious and literal sense, nor did he offer to undeceive them herein as in other matters of less consequence it was his usual custom to do, and as he would have undoubtedly done on this occasion had he not meant the reality of his presence, as they understood him. He was so far from expounding his words in a figurative sense, and so far from revoking what he had said of giving his real flesh and blood in the blessed Eucharist, that after reprehending their incredulity for not believing his words in the simplicity of faith, he asserted the same truth in more positive terms, and confirmed them in the idea they had formed of his intention to give his real flesh and blood, and not a bare figure of it, saying, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you*, v. 54.

On this occasion many of our Saviour's disciples murmured, and refused to believe him; but the ways of Omnipotence were not limited to their gross and carnal notions; he who was to raise himself from the dead, and ascend glorious into Heaven, could not be at a loss to effect this in a real manner, though different from what they had conceived. His ascension into Heaven in an immortal, impassible and glorious body, was surely as great a prodigy as his sacramental presence in the Eucharist; he that could perform the one might well get credit for the other. Hence he said to them, *Doth this scandalize you? What if you shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?* v. 63. as if he had said, If what I have told you concerning the eating of my flesh and drinking my blood, offends you so much; if you make such a difficulty of believing this great truth whilst I am visible amongst you, how much more difficulty will you make of believing it after I am gone from you by my ascension? This is a farther proof that the words of Christ are to be understood of a real receiving of his flesh and blood, since his ascension could not give the Jews of Capernaum greater occasion of scandal, or rendered the belief of this mystery more difficult, if his body and blood were only to be received in figure or in spirit. The Evangelist tells us, that Christ perceiving, then, that many of his disciples withdrew and separated themselves from him in consequence of what he had said in such positive terms, he turned about ot

the twelve whom he had chosen for his Apostles, and asked them, *Would they also go away?* Whereupon Peter answered, and said in the name of the rest, *Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have known that thou art Christ the Son of God,* v. 69. and 70. As if he had said, O Lord, to whom shall we apply for instruction but to thee? Who can teach us the truths of salvation and of eternal life, but thou? Though we do not comprehend what thou revealest, we firmly believe all that thou sayest to be true, because thou art the Son of the living God, who cannot deceive us, or be deceived.

There are no less than thirteen different texts in the New Testament on this subject, and every one of them affirms the Catholic doctrine of the real presence; and there is not one single text in the whole Scripture that affirms the contrary. Luther himself acknowledges, in his writings, that the *words of the Gospel are too clear to deny the real presence.* The Church of England openly professed it for the space of nine hundred years, as all historians allow, and the common Prayer Book seems still to profess it, as it says, in express terms, that *the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken, and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper; verily and indeed signifying the same as truly and really.* We cannot be deceived herein, since it is impossible that the Gospel, and that God himself, who is the infallible author of it, should have deceived us. We know that he is able to do infinitely more than our limited understanding is able to comprehend; and we know from his own clear and positive testimony, that he was willing, and that he actually does give us, in the blessed Eucharist, *the very same flesh that he gave for the life of the world, and the very same blood that he shed for the remission of our sins.* In effect, why should it not be as easy for him to be really and truly present under the appearance of bread and wine, as it was for him to be really present under the appearance of a dying criminal on the cross, and under the figure of a gardener, when he appeared to Mary Magdalen on the road to the sepulchre, or as it was for the Holy Ghost to be really present under the appearance of a dove at our Saviour's baptism, and under the form of fiery tongues on the day of Pentecost? Are not the laws of nature perfectly subject to the divine will? And as God made all things out of nothing, is he not master to suspend, change and dispose them at pleasure for the greater manifestation of his power, wisdom, mercy and love? Did he not create the universe with a single word? Did he not turn the slime of the earth into the flesh and blood of Adam? Did he not convert the rivers of Egypt into blood? Did he not transform the rod of Moses into a serpent? Is he not able to make a camel pass through the eye of a needle? Before we presume to fathom his Almighty power, we should, as St.

Basil formerly said to Eunomius, first be able to account for the structure of a little fly, and for other marvellous things in nature which are impervious to human understanding.

Transubstantiation was the very first miracle that our Lord wrought before his disciples at the wedding of Cana, for he there made a total change of one substance into another, that is, of water into wine; nay, bread and wine are daily transubstantiated or changed into human flesh and blood, by the ordinary course of digestion. The wonderful conversion or change of the inward substance of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, that is wrought by his almighty power in the blessed Eucharist, is properly and aptly called *Transubstantiation*; for as, when the divinity of Christ began first to be attacked by the Arians, the Church made use of the word *Consubstantial*, to express more distinctly that the Son of God is of the same substance with the Father; so in like manner, when the mystery of the Eucharist began to be openly attacked by Berengarius, about the close of the eleventh century, the Church thought fit to express it by a word which leaves no room for unbelievers to play in, and which only signifies what has been the constant belief of the Christian world, and the unanimous doctrine and tradition of all the great luminaries of venerable antiquity, in all nations and ages since the days of Christ and his Apostles, as the authors of the learned work, called the *Perpetuity of the Faith*, have invincibly proved. To avoid prolixity, I shall only quote a few striking passages out of the writings of the fathers, who must be allowed to have been acquainted with the faith of the Church in the earliest ages, and to be unexceptionable witnesses of what the Christians unanimously believed in their times. St. Justin Martyr, who wrote in the middle of the second century, speaking of the blessed Eucharist, says, that the Christians did not look on it as mere bread and wine, but took it as the flesh and blood of Jesus incarnate. St. Irenæus, who wrote in the same century, calls the Eucharist the body of the Lord. Tertullian also calls it the body of the Lord. Origen likewise says, when you receive this heavenly food, you eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord; he then enters under your roof, and, you are humbly to say with the centurion, Lord, I am not worthy, &c. St. Cyprian, who lived in the third century, says, The bread which our Lord gave to his disciples being changed, not in shape, but in substance, by the omnipotence of the word is made flesh. St. Gregory of Nyssa, who lived in the fourth century, says, We believe that the sanctified bread is transmuted or changed by the word of God, into the body of the Son of God. Here, my brethren, we plainly see that these illustrious doctors assert the substantial change of the bread and wine, which the Church expresses by the word *Transubstantiation*, or *Transmutation*. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who also lived in the fourth century, writes thus;

Since Christ himself pronounced it, and said, *THIS IS MY BODY*, who after that shall dare to doubt of it? And since he says, *THIS IS MY BLOOD*, who would dare to say it is not his blood? He once changed water into wine, and does he not deserve to be believed, when he has transmuted or changed wine into his blood? With a certainty excluding all manner of doubt, we take the body and blood of Christ; for under the appearance of bread, his body is given, and his blood under the appearance of wine, &c. A little after he says, *Do not judge of it by the taste, but let faith make you certain that you are honored with the flesh and blood of Christ, &c. &c.* St. Hilary says, that there can be no doubt of the real body and blood of Christ being in the sacrament, lib. viii. n. 12. 14. St. Ambrose, who flourished in the same century, says, *Which is more excellent, the bread of Angels, viz. the manna, or the flesh of Christ? Light is superior to the shadow, the reality to the figure; the body of the Author of Heaven, to the manna from Heaven.* You may perhaps say, *I see another thing, how can this be the body of Christ? Because, by the benediction nature itself is changed.* Then alleging different examples of such changes, as of the rod into a serpent, of water into blood, he proceeds thus: *If a human benediction was so powerful as to change nature, what shall we say of the divine consecration itself, where God's own words operate? Is not the word of Christ, which could make out of nothing that which was not, powerful enough to change the things that are into what they were not.* And again, *Before the consecration, it is bread that is upon the altar; after the consecration, it is the flesh of Jesus Christ,* Lib. 4. de Sacr. c. 5. The words of St. John Chrysostom, who was born about the year 334, are very remarkable: *Let us believe God always, nor contradict him, though what he says appear above our reason; for his word cannot deceive us, but our senses may be easily deceived. As, therefore he said, This is my body, let us believe without any hesitation. We are nourished with that flesh which the Angels see, and tremble. What shepherd ever fed his flock with his flesh? He nourishes us with his own body, he cements and incorporates us with himself; he makes us his own body, not merely by FAITH, but in fact and in reality. What then should be so spotless as he who partakes of this sacrifice? Should not the hand which divides this sacred flesh, and the tongue which is purpled with this miraculous blood, exceed in purity the very rays of the sun?*

The testimonies of the aforesaid holy doctors, who wrote so many hundred years ago, without quoting numberless others who lived in the succeeding ages, are abundantly sufficient to shew that the faith which the Catholic Church now holds and professes in the eighteenth century, with regard to the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, is the self-same that was held and professed by the primitive Church in the purest ages of Christianity, as they are called, and that it has been uniformly

handed down from generation to generation, even to the present time. We are, therefore, as fully persuaded and as positively certain of the truth of this mystery, as we are of the truth of any other mystery of the Christian religion. The brightest luminaries that the world has produced could not discover any contradiction in this mystery, nor do thousands of the most learned philosophers and divines see any in it, more than in the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation, which Christians of every denomination believe, though they are no less sublime, no less elevated above the reach of our understanding, and no less obscure in themselves. Human reason, unaided by faith, is no less bewildered in endeavouring to account for them, and they may be as well denied as this mystery, by those who are resolved to shut their eyes against the light of revelation, and believe nothing but what they are able to comprehend and perceive with their senses; but divine faith does not stand on the fallible testimony of the senses, nor on the weak reasoning of man, but on the wisdom and veracity of God. Even reason itself, when properly directed, tells us that nothing is more just, nothing more reasonable, than to captivate and submit our understanding to his infinite wisdom.

The more we consider this divine mystery, and the signal benefits and blessings that the faithful derive from it, the more endearing motives shall we discover to love the Lord our God, and to admire the wonderful ways of his providence, and the incomprehensible riches of his bounty and goodness, in having left us so valuable a present, so precious a legacy. O, what returns of gratitude and acknowledgment ought we then to make him for having contrived this expedient to abide with us to the end of time, according to the promise he made to his Apostles in chap xxviii. of St. Matthew, saying, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Should not, my brethren, our belief of his real presence in the Eucharist enkindle in us the most ardent desires to approach him frequently with the most profound humility, respect and veneration? Should it not excite us to testify our love and esteem for him, with all the affections of our souls, and to invite Heaven and earth to join with us in proclaiming his mercy? O amiable Jesus! praise, honour and glory be for ever to thy holy name! What honour dost thou confer on us poor worms of the earth! How great a condescension to give thy sacred body to be our food! O grant, we beseech thee, that we may duly correspond with the designs of thy mercy, and partake of this banquet of thy love with such dispositions as are pleasing to thee, and necessary to qualify us for receiving thy divine grace in this life, and inheriting thy eternal glory in the next. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, *Amen.*

GOOD FRIDAY.

On the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Predicamus Christum Crucifixum.—1 Cor. c. i. v. 23.

We preach Christ crucified.—1 Cor, c. i. v. 23.

NATURE, indeed, may teach us to expatiate on the loss of a tender parent, to bewail the death of a faithful friend, to sprinkle the tombs of our ancestors with our tears, and to raise our sorrow in proportion to their merit; but when we contemplate the death of a God made man, whose sufferings, equal to his goodness, infinitely surpass the force of nature, and the reach of imagination, we must allow that tears are feeble emblems of the grief we owe him, and words but empty succours to distress. Yet such is the dolorous mystery which the Church commemorates on this ever memorable day, a mystery that heretofore split the very rocks themselves asunder, that astonished the Heavens, confounded hell, called the admiring dead from the grave, frightened day into night, plunged the universe into convulsions, and drew compassion from every spring of life. There is nothing in religion more worthy of our serious consideration, or more capable of inflaming our hearts with the love of God, and inspiring us with a hatred and detestation of our sins, which were the unhappy cause of all the sufferings of the Son of God. Here the Holy of Holies is presented to our view, not in a state of grandeur, power and majesty, but in the midst of humiliations, ignominies and torments, charged with the crimes of the world, abandoned by his friends, forsaken and betrayed by his disciples, given up to the rage of his executioners, and sacrificed for the redemption of mankind. Here we see his innocent body torn with deep gashes, streaming with blood, fastened to a disgraceful cross, hanging between Heaven and earth, his head crowned with thorns, his mouth drenched with vinegar and gall, his eyes grown dim and drowned in tears, his hands and feet bored with nails, and his side transfixed with a spear. Behold, my dear brethren, the mournful mystery that calls us all this morning to the foot of the cross. If any theme or subject can challenge or command our hearts and tears, surely this ought, and as it is the strangest event that ever happened, it requires the most profound meditation. Every day should be a Good Friday to a Christian who desires, with St. Paul, to know nothing except Jesus Christ crucified; but as St. John Chrysostom says, this day in particular ought to be employed in prayers, sighs and lamentations; in pouring out tears of com-

punction from our eyes, and making suitable returns of love and gratitude from our hearts; for must not that soul be insensible, that mind inflexible, that heart impenetrable and harder than brass, that will not relent and be affected at the thoughts of the bloody tragedy that was acted on this day. How shall I be able to describe it, and to form any design or establish any order in a subject where disorder, confusion, and horror reign in every part, and where every thing was carried on to an unspeakable height of excess? Excess of charity, excess of justice, excess of cruelty. Never was there seen more love on the one hand, never more rage on the other. The one was infinite, the other extreme, and both without example. He that gives life and being to the universe, was crucified by the hands of those who live by his power. The Creator was put to death, and his creatures were the executioners. They exerted their malice to destroy him, and he made use of their very crimes to save them.

To open this tragic scene, and to describe without art what we ought to deplore without deceit, permit me, my brethren, to conduct you in spirit to the three different stages of our Lord's Passion, in order to give you some idea of what he endured in the garden of Olives, in the city of Jerusalem, and on the mountain of Calvary, the dismal place of execution, where he consummated his sacrifice and laid down his life for his flock. Shall we, according to the usual custom, previously invoke the intercession of his most holy mother, and greet her with the words of the Angel, *full of grace and blessed amongst women*? Alas! the cruelty of the Jews rendered Mary, on this mournful occasion, *full of grief and the most afflicted amongst women*. The cross supplied her place on Good Friday, and carried between its extended arms *the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus*. It became then the tree of life, the throne of mercy, the instrument of our redemption, and the bed of our dying Father. It is therefore to the foot of the cross that the Church sends us at present, to recite devoutly with her in the pious ceremonies of this day, the sacred hymn, *O Crux Ave, &c.*

Our first parents having forfeited their original innocence, and shut the gates of Heaven against themselves and their whole posterity by their disobedience, it became necessary, that a victim of infinite dignity should be substituted in our place, in order to appease the wrath of God, and to atone, in the rigour of justice, for the offence and injury offered to his infinite Majesty by sin. The whole creation was not able to furnish such a victim. Wherefore, when four thousand years had elapsed after the fall of Adam, the Heavens sent down a Redeemer of infinite dignity, the eternal son of the living God, Jesus Christ both God and man, man to be capable of suffering, and God to give an infinite value to his sufferings. He was pleased to choose the small town of Bethlehem for the glory of his nativity, and the great city of Jerusalem for the ignominy

of his passion and death. The time which he chose for accomplishing the great work of human redemption, was the time that was appointed for the immolation of the Paschal lamb of the Jews, and the anniversary of the very same day on which the children of Israel had been released from the bondage of Egypt, to denote thereby that he was the true Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, and to release mankind from the bondage of the infernal Pharaoh, by substituting himself in the place of the figurative lamb, and offering up to his eternal Father his sacred body upon the altar of the cross, as a bleeding victim and sacrifice of propitiation. One single drop of his precious blood was sufficient to atone for the sins of a thousand worlds, by reason of the infinite dignity of his divine person; but, as the devout St. Bernard remarks, what was sufficient for our redemption, was not sufficient for his boundless charity. *Cum guttâ posset undâ redemit.* He was willing to work a copious redemption, and to wash away the foul stains of our sins with a deluge of blood.

O how truly did the Evangelists say, that when Jesus loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them unto the end, and gave them still stronger proofs, and more signal pledges of his love, as he drew nearer to his death. O with what astonishment must the Angels have beheld him prostrate at the feet of his disciples at his last supper, washing and wiping them with the most profound humility, and afterwards bequeathing to his Church, by his last will and testament, the inestimable legacy of his own sacred body and blood, in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist? Having retired the same evening from Jerusalem with three of the disciples, Peter, James and John, to a neighbouring village called Gethsemani, he entered into a garden situated at the foot of Mount Olivet. Here it was that the conflict began, which ended only on Mount Calvary; for as the downfall and ruin of mankind had commenced in a garden, it was expedient that the reparation and redemption of mankind should likewise commence in a garden, as St. Peter Chrysologus says. The garden of Eden had been the first theatre of sin; therefore, by a wise disposition of Providence, the garden of Olives became the first stage of our Redeemer's passion. There his blessed soul underwent an interior martyrdom, and was drowned in an ocean of sorrows. There his affectionate heart was seized with strange convulsions of grief, and almost torn asunder with fits of sadness. There the joy of Angels and the sweet comforter of all afflicted and distressed souls, was overwhelmed with so heavy a load of affliction, that he breathed forth this doleful complaint: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death*; as if he had said that the anguish of his mind alone was sufficient to put a period to his life, had not the Almighty power of his divinity supported the weakness of his humanity, and reserved him for undergoing still greater trials. Fainting away under a double conflict both of mind and body, he pros-

trated himself with his face on the ground, and fell into a most painful agony, which caused streams of his blood to gush forth in abundance, and run down in large drops on the earth where he lay; this made St. Ambrose say, that Jesus shed tears of blood for our sake in the garden of Olives, and wept for our sins with as many eyes as he had pores in his sacred body. What chiefly caused this bloody sweat, and preyed most on his loving heart, was the foresight he had of our base ingratitude, and the loss of numberless souls, which he knew would reap no benefit from the remedy that his charity had prepared for all, but frustrate the designs of his mercy, and perish eternally through their own obstinacy and perverseness, in spite of all he was to suffer for their salvation. He likewise set before his eyes, in the most lively colours, the treachery of his disciples, the malice of his enemies, the rage of his executioners, and the violence of the excruciating torments they were preparing for him; there was not one thorn of the painful crown, which did not already pierce his heart, not one lash of the whips with which he was to be scourged that did not make him shudder, not one buffet or stroke which they were to give him that did not cover him with confusion; all these melancholy reflections assailed his affectionate soul at once, made the deepest impressions on his mind, and raised his sorrow to the very highest degree.

In this dismal situation he betook himself to prayer, to teach us that prayer is our best and surest resource in time of distress, and a most powerful means to overcome all sorts of temptations; he prayed with humility, fervency, resignation and perseverance, to set us an example how we are to pray; he addressed his petition to his heavenly Father, three different times before an Angel was sent from Heaven to comfort him in his agony, instructing us thereby that the grace which is seemingly refused in the beginning is often granted in the end, and therefore, that we are not to despond when we do not immediately obtain our requests, but that we are to redouble our fervour, and to continue with an unwearied perseverance to strike at the gate of mercy until it be opened to us. In the interim the three disciples, who had been eye witnesses of his glorious transfiguration on Mount Thabor, and were now become sad spectators of the infirmities of his human nature in the garden of Olives, unmindful of his orders and of their own danger, fell fast asleep instead of watching and praying, as they had been warned, lest they should yield to temptation. Their sleep, says Eusebius, was a figure of the spiritual lethargy, sloth and indolence of many Christians of our days, who are so drowsy in their devotions, so tepid and lukewarm in the service of God, and so careless in watching and praying with Jesus, that they justly deserve the same reproach he made to Simon Peter when he found him asleep with his companions, *Could'st thou not have watched one single hour with me? Alas!*

how far more diligent and attentive are the children of darkness in serving their master, than the children of light are in serving the living God? Whilst Peter and his companions were sleeping, Judas, the unhappy Apostate, was vigilant and active in planning the death of Christ in concert with the Jewish Priests, Scribes and Pharisees. Avarice, which was his predominant passion, induced him to sell his Lord and Master sacrilegiously for thirty pieces of silver, then the ordinary price of a common slave; he came to the garden of Olives in an hostile manner at the head of an armed multitude, for the wicked purpose of betraying him with a kiss, which was the signal agreed upon, and which the Saviour of the world received from him with the meekness of a lamb, though, as St. Leo observes, it pierced his heart more cruelly than the spear which opened his side on Mount Calvary. Suetonius the historian relates, that Julius Cæsar seeing a troop of armed men come to assassinate him in the Senate House of Rome, and remarking amongst them a particular favourite of his own, by name Brutus, on whom he had conferred many signal favours, accosted him thus, *Et tu, fili mi Brute?* And thou, my son Brutus, what, hast thou turned traitor? Art thou come to take away the life of thy father, thy friend and benefactor? Is it thus that thou requitest my kindness to thee? It was much after the same manner that Jesus accosted Judas: *My friend*, said he, *what art thou come to do?* Dost thou intend to betray the Son of Man with a kiss? Is it thus that thou repayest my love with the blackest ingratitude and the basest perfidiousness? but all his affectionate and endearing expressions made no impression on the hardened heart of the traitor, which Satan had already taken possession of. No-sooner was the fatal signal given, than the impious multitude rushed in upon the innocent Jesus, and began to exercise their barbarity upon his sacred person with open violence; but to manifest his divine power, and to let them see that no human force was able to prevail against him without his own free will and consent, our blessed Saviour first prostrated them with these two words, *Ego sum*; I am; and made them reel backwards as if they had been thunderstruck. If his humility was then so powerful, when he came to be judged, cries out St. Leo, what will his Majesty not do when he shall come to judge? How shall the reprobate be able to withstand his thundering voice on the last day, if he then cast his enemies down with two words, before he gave them power to seize on him?

Behold your loving Redeemer now in the hands of a furious rabble, armed with swords and clubs. He is dragged inhumanly about midnight from the garden of sorrow and tears, to Jerusalem, the second stage of his passion. He enters that ungrateful city, not in triumph, nor in the midst of pious hosannas, as on Palm Sunday, but in the midst of horrid blasphemies and cruel crucifixes, bound with cords like a malefactor,

surrounded with guards, forsaken by his friends, abandoned by his disciples, and left to the mercy of his merciless enemies. O strange vicissitude of human affairs! How fickle, inconstant and capricious are the praises and applauses of the world? They who are our friends, and who load us with blessings this day, will perhaps become our enemies to-morrow, and load us with calumnies and maledictions. What a lively representation have we here in the Jews, who in the course of a few days changed their hosannas into crucifixes, of the shameful conduct of those Christians, who one day receive Jesus Christ in the blessed sacrament with the outward appearance of piety and devotion, and five or six days after banish him out of the temple of their souls, relapsing into sin, and blaspheming him with the same lips which were employed shortly before in praising his holy name? *The Son of God was led like a lamb to the slaughter house, without opening his mouth*; he was presented before no less than four different judges, Annas, Caiphas, Pilate and Herod; the two former were Jews, and the two latter were Pagans. False witnesses were suborned, groundless and contradictory charges were brought forward against the Judge of the living and the dead; he was questioned by Annas, condemned by Caiphas, tortured by Pilate, and mocked by Herod. Caiphas, the High Priest, more desirous to convict him of blasphemy than to learn the truth, conjured him in the name of the living God to tell if he was the Son of God. Jesus Christ, to remove all pretext of ignorance, and to teach his followers that they must rather expose their lives to the fury of tyrants than dissemble, conceal or deny their faith when they are juridically questioned, openly declared the truth, though he foresaw that this declaration would be counted blasphemy and cost him his life. Sentence of death being then most unjustly pronounced against him by the Sanhedrim or Grand Council of the Jewish nation, he was left the remainder of the night in the custody of the High Priest's servants, who breaking through all the barriers of decency and moderation, seemed to vie with each other which of them would give him the grossest abuse, and the basest treatment. St. Jerom tells us that one-half of what our divine Redeemer endured that night, shall not be made known until the day of Judgment. They muffled up his eyes with a rag, bantered him as a mock prophet, spit upon him with the utmost contempt, and disfigured his divine features with repeated blows. One vile slave among the rest had the effrontery to raise his polluted hands, and strike the Son of God across the face with great force and vehemence. O ye angels of God, how could ye bear such an insult and injury offered to your Creator? An angel from Heaven stopped the Patriarch Abraham's arm, when it was reached out to sacrifice his son Isaac. Oza, a Prince of Juda, was instantly struck dead upon the spot, for having stretched out his hand to prevent the Ark of the Cove-

nant from falling to the ground. Jeroboam, King of Israel, having raised his hand to strike a Prophet of the Lord, his hand immediately became motionless and dried up. And, O ye Heavens be astonished! the hand, not of a Patriarch, a Prince, or a King, but of a mean despicable slave, is audaciously lifted up to strike the Son of God on the face, and there is no one to ward off the blow! He could, indeed, have ordered fire from Heaven like Elias, to consume the inhuman wretch to ashes; or like Moses, he could have commanded the earth to open and swallow him up alive. He could have ordered legions of Angels to fly to his assistance and destroy all his enemies; but he chose rather to leave us a shining example of patience and humility. O Christians, let your suffering Jesus be your model and your consolation, whenever you happen to be insulted and abused; cast your eyes upon this divine pattern of forbearance, and learn from him to be meek and humble of heart; learn from him that true courage does not consist in duelling, revenging affronts, and retaliating injuries, but in bearing them with fortitude for the love of God; learn, in short, to look upon your enemies as the instruments of God's justice, and to receive adversity, afflictions and disgraces, as coming from his holy hands, and designed for the good of your souls.

All the aforesaid indignities did not give the good Shepherd so much concern; nor affect his compassionate heart so sensibly as the loss of one strayed sheep, the spiritual and eternal death of one soul, the final impenitence of unhappy Judas, who filled up the measure of his iniquities, and sealed his reprobation with despair and self murder. O good God! what is man when left to himself? what is he not capable of, when he is not supported by thy grace? into what a dreadful precipice does he not blindly rush, when he hardens his heart against thy inspirations, rejects thy calls, and shuts his eyes and ears against the divine light, and the words of eternal life? Another subject of deep concern for our Divine Redeemer, was the fall of Simon Peter, who denied him three different times; but his sin was not the result of a corrupt heart; it sprung from cowardice and not from malice; when he should have watched and prayed, he betook himself to sleep, and when he should have shunned the dangerous occasions of sin, he rashly ran into bad company, and began to converse with the wicked servants of Caiphas. The causes of his fall were the same that plunge thousands in our days into criminal disorders, presumption on the one hand, and negligence on the other; they unhappily imitate Peter in sinning, and deny the Lord their God, at least by their actions, if not by their words, and that, a thousand times more grievously than Peter; yet how seldom do they imitate him in repenting? though they have no other way to avert the wrath of Heaven, and to escape this dreadful

sentence of the Gospel, *He who shall deny me before men, I will deny him before my Father, who is in Heaven, Mat. x.*

Whilst Peter was lamenting his infidelity with floods of tears, Jesus was hurried away in the morning from the Tribunal of Caiphas to the Civil Court of Judicature, that the unjust sentence already pronounced by the High Priest might be ratified and put into execution, by the authority of Pontius Pilate, the Roman President, and Governor of Judea. Pilate was conscious of Christ's innocence, and knowing that the Jewish Priests, Scribes and Pharisees were much prejudiced and embittered against him, because he had discovered their hypocrisy, inveighed against their vices, and eclipsed all their glory by the splendor of his miracles, the purity of his doctrine, and the sanctity of his life; he therefore made some weak efforts to rescue him out of their hands, and set him at liberty. He transmitted him first out of policy to King Herod, who being offended because Christ made him no answer, and was unwilling to gratify his curiosity by working a miracle in his presence, treated him with contempt and derision, and sent him back in a fool's dress through the public streets to the Court of Pilate. Pilate and Herod had been at variance until that juncture, but on this occasion they became reconciled, for men who differ from each other in many other respects, will often agree and coincide in opinion when there is a question of rejecting truth, and oppressing innocence. Pilate then set Christ in competition with a notorious criminal, called Barabbas, who was in confinement for a murder he had committed; for as it was customary every year to discharge a prisoner on that day, at the option and request of the people, in memory of the deliverance of their forefathers from the bondage of Egypt, he supposed that their choice would fall upon Jesus their most bountiful benefactor, and that they would undoubtedly give him the preference before a public malefactor and murderer. *Which of the two, said he, shall I discharge, Barabbas or Jesus?* But the ungrateful populace, spurred on by the Priests, Scribes and Pharisees, who had resolved at all events to have Jesus put to death, unanimously petitioned in favour of Barabbas the murderer, crying out to Pilate *release Barabbas and crucify Jesus.* See what malice is capable of when it has taken possession of the soul! Never did envy appear more virulent, never was injustice more barefaced, never was any choice more preposterous or more unreasonable. You seem to be fired with indignation hereat, and yet alas! such is the monstrous choice you make O sinner, whenever you prefer the gratification of your passions, and the pleasures of sense to the grace and friendship of the Lord your God. By every mortal sin you commit, you cry out as loud as the Jews, *release Barabbas and crucify Jesus*; nay, as Tertullian says, you give the devil himself the preference before Jesus Christ.

Pilate, at length, being willing to gratify the Jews in some measure, set Barabbas at liberty, and wishing at the same time to preserve Jesus from being crucified, ordered him to be scourged, but unfortunately left the direction of it to a set of men from whom no more mercy was to be expected than from wolves and tigers. No sooner was the order given but it was executed. The innocent lamb of God was immediately surrounded by a band of blood-thirsty soldiers, armed with the dire instruments of the cruel operation, fury in their eyes, malice in their hearts, and scourges in their hands. He who decks the lilies of the valley, and clothes the universe, was stripped of his garments, and his virgin body was exposed to the view of an insolent rabble; the hands of him who created Heaven and earth were fastened to a stone pillar which only came up to his waist, that the scourges might reach his body on every side without the least obstruction; but if Sampson broke all the cords and bandages of the Philistians with ease, where could the Jews find cords and ropes strong enough to bind the hands of the Son of God? The Royal Prophet replies, and tells us, Psalms, cxviii. that it was with the ropes and cords of our sins that our dear Redeemer was tied; it was the bond of his strong love and charity for us that fastened him to the pillar, says St. Augustine; without it, all the fetters and bandages of the Jews would have been insufficient. To break the chains of our sins he suffered his hands to be tied, and permitted the executioners to discharge a volley of lashes upon his back, upon his breast, upon his arms and upon his shoulders; every stroke they gave him made a wound, every wound a stream of blood. It was forbidden by the law of Moses, Deut. c. xxv. to inflict more than forty lashes on any malefactor; but with regard to the innocent Jesus, the cruel executioners consulted no other rule but their own rage; they struck him without measure, they scourged him without pity, they tore him without mercy until they mangled his sacred body, cut his veins and arteries across, and laid open his flesh to the very bones, so as to see and reckon them, as the Royal Prophet speaks, Ps. xxi. Fury could do no more; envy could desire no more; yet all this was not enough to glut the malice of his enemies; they proceeded to a new scene of barbarity, never heard of in the world before; to add infamy to his sufferings they untied him from the pillar, now purpled with his gore, and arrayed him in the formal state of a mock King, as if he was a false pretender to royalty; they covered his shoulders with an old cloak instead of a royal robe; they put a reed in his hand instead of a royal sceptre, and instead of a royal diadem they placed on his head a most painful crown of sharp thorns twisted together, which they pressed and beat down forcibly, in order to make them penetrate the deeper, and drive them, if possible into his very brains. O my brethren, what tongue is able to express, what understanding able to compre-

hend the racking torture which our Redeemer endured from this mock coronation? I leave yourselves to judge how the points of the thorns, entering in at his forehead, his temples, his eyes, the crown and back of his head must have caused a shower of blood to gush forth in abundance, and trickle down his neck and his face on every side. Well might he then say with the Prophet, *O, ye all that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow comparable to mine?* Yet he bore all his sorrows and all these most excruciating pains with patience, and even with pleasure, in order to purchase for you, and for me, a never-fading Crown of Glory in the kingdom of Heaven. O be thou a thousand times blessed, O amiable Jesus! What hast thou not done for our sake? How dearly hast thou paid for our sins? O do not suffer us to die impenitent like Judas, and to be eternally lost after all thou hast done for our salvation. We prostrate ourselves again at the foot of thy cross, and beseech thee to cast one glance of thy merciful eyes on us this day, as thou didst on Simon Peter, that like him we may sincerely repent and be truly converted. Mollify our hearts, and melt them into tears of compunction, for it is but just that our sins should draw bitter tears from our eyes, and penitential sighs from our hearts, as they have drawn so many streams of blood from thy veins.

Our Divine Redeemer being reduced to a state capable of melting the heart of a stone, Pilate imagined that the sight of so piteous an object would allay the fury and disarm the hatred of his most inveterate enemies, so far, at least, as to induce them to desist from demanding his crucifixion; he therefore produced him to the people, and cried out with a loud voice, *Ecce homo*, Behold the man; see how he is all rent and mangled, so as scarce to retain the figure of a man; for you are to observe, that the deluded hypocrites scrupled entering Pilate's Hall, because he was a Pagan, lest they might be thereby defiled; like unto many sinners of our days, who stumble at straws and leap over blocks; they were afraid of contracting a legal uncleanness that could only reach the body, and they were not afraid of polluting their souls with the most heinous of all crimes. They were men, forsooth, of so nice and delicate a conscience, as St. Augustine says ironically of them, that they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel; they were exact, even to a nicety, in some observances of little or no consequence, whilst they openly violated the most essential duties of justice and charity without remorse, and made no account of murdering the innocent Lamb of God with the two-edged sword of their envenomed tongues. So far were they from relenting, or being excited to compassion by a view of the piteous object which Pilate exhibited to them, that on the contrary the sight of his blood and gaping wounds served only to animate them, like so many tigers, to redouble their tumults and clamours, their shouts and cruci-

figes. In vain did Pilate expostulate with them on the injustice of shedding innocent blood; in vain also did he attempt to exculpate himself, by washing his hands in their presence, and declaring he would not concur in so horrid a crime. His hands were too deeply imbrued in the innocent blood of Christ for all the water of the ocean to clear him of the guilt he incurred, by acting in direct opposition to the dictates of his conscience, and yielding to the importunities of the Jews out of human respect, and through a servile fear of incurring the displeasure of the Roman Emperor, with which they threatened him. Like several unhappy Christians of this age, who sacrifice their immortal souls for a worldly perishable interest, and give up their pretensions to Heaven for a living here on earth, the unjust and mercenary Judge consented at length to the crucifixion and death of the Son of God, in order to secure the lucrative employment which he held under Cæsar. Methinks I now see the city of Jerusalem in an uproar, the streets lined with an insulting mob, and echoing with curses and blasphemies, the mournful procession proceeding from Pilate's Court towards the place of execution, and escorted by a guard of soldiers and an herald proclaiming the sentence. An immense multitude of people were assembled there at that time from all parts, to celebrate the feast of the Passover, yet few or none of them were touched with compassion except some pious women, who were bathed in tears on beholding the innocent Lamb of God, like another Isaac, loaded with the wood that was to consume his sacrifice, and marking the way to Mount Calvary with drops of his blood. He carried the cross upon his mangled and bleeding shoulders, as the head and model of the elect, teaching us by his example, as well as by his word, that if we have a mind to be happy with him hereafter, we must take up our cross in this life, and follow him through the narrow road of penance and mortification. The cross was a light weight for his charity, says St. Augustine, but it must have been a very heavy and insupportable weight for his body, which was then almost exhausted by the great loss of blood he had sustained in the Garden of Olives and at the Court of Pilate. It pressed so hard upon his wounds that he began to sink under the load, and was scarce able to creep along, which his enemies perceiving, and fearing he would expire on the way before they could enjoy the satisfaction of crucifying him alive, they drove him forward and hauled him along, till at length he arrived with much difficulty at the end of his painful journey.

Contemplate your loving Redeemer now, not as a God shining with flames of glory, as on Mount Thabor, but as a *man of sorrows*, covered with wounds, and grabbing up the mountain of Calvary. The executioners did not even allow him time to breathe, but hastily dragged off his garments, which being pressed into his wounds by the weight of the

cross, and glued to the small remains of flesh that stuck to his bones, must have suddenly dragged the flesh away with them, so that all his former wounds were renewed in an instant and made to bleed afresh; his body was then thrown down on the ground, pulled to and fro, and stretched upon the hard bed of the cross, without any other pillow to support his head but the thorns with which he was crowned; his hands, which sway the sceptre of Heaven, and his feet, which trample upon the powers of hell, were dug and bored with large nails, which being driven into the tender flesh by repeated strokes of the hammer, forced their way through the centre of the nerves and sinews, the veins and arteries, and caused four copious streams of blood to flow from the four great wounds of his hands and feet. Being thus fastened to the cross by the hands and feet, the head of the gibbet was raised with ropes into the air, amidst the loud acclamations and shouts of the populace, and the foot of it was suddenly dropt into a deep pit prepared for the purpose. We may, therefore, naturally conclude, that as the whole weight of his body was then supported by, and continually pressed upon his perforated hands and feet, all these violent pressures, sudden motions and shakings, must have widened his wounds, redoubled his pains, and occasioned an universal torment all over his entire frame, *from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head*, as the Prophet says. There was no part of him now without its peculiar torment, says St. Bernard, except his tongue and his heart, and therefore the one was drenched with vinegar and gall, and the other was pierced with a spear by one of the soldiers, named Longinus. This made the devout St. Bonaventure cry out and say, *O Longinus, why dost thou wound a heart already wounded with the arrows of divine love?* Joab was formerly deemed cruel for having wounded the heart of Absalom with three spears; but Longinus, still more cruel, wounded three hearts with one spear, the heart of Jesus, the heart of Mary his blessed mother, and the heart of St. John, his beloved disciple, who were then standing at the foot of the cross, melted into tears and drowned in an ocean of sorrow. It is easy to conceive, that it must have been a most afflicting sight for the dearest of all mothers to behold the dearest of all sons, hanging in the most excruciating posture before her eyes, without being able to afford him the least comfort or relief. The sight of Mary increased the pains of Jesus, and the nails that fastened Jesus to the cross, tore the compassionate bowels and transfixed the loving heart of Mary. However, the presence of Mary became a copious source of blessings for the faithful in general, as our Divine Redeemer, on that occasion, placed them under the special care and protection of his blessed mother, having by his dying words expressly appointed her their spiritual mother, and them her adoptive children, when he said to St. John,

and in the person of St. John to all the members of his Church, who were then represented by St. John, *Behold thy mother*; and again to her, *Behold thy son*. In this dismal situation Jesus hung alive for the space of three long hours between two robbers, one on his right hand, the other on his left. Behold here a striking representation of what is to happen on the day of judgment, when, as the Gospel tells us, the elect are to be placed on the right hand, and the reprobate on the left hand of the Sovereign Judge; the former to be invited to the possession of his heavenly kingdom, the latter to be sentenced to unquenchable flames. One of the robbers prayed, repented, and was assured of his salvation with these comfortable words, *This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise*. The other blasphemed, and as a dreadful warning to all unhappy cursers, swearers and blasphemers, was suffered to die impenitent in his sins. In one of those two robbers we have a consoling instance of God's boundless mercy, that no sinner should despair let his crimes be ever so grievous; in the other we have a terrifying instance of God's rigorous justice, that no sinner should presume to defer his repentance to the last hour, or rely on the great uncertainty of a death-bed conversion. But let us return to our agonizing Redeemer. Whilst he was thus elevated between Heaven and earth, as a Mediator between God and man, he preached charity and patience to us from the pulpit of the cross, as St. Augustine speaks, and offered himself to the justice of his eternal Father as a victim of reconciliation for the whole world, imploring mercy and pardon for you and for me, and for all sinners, even for his most implacable enemies; *Father forgive them*, he said, *for they know not what they do*. The blasphemous reproaches and raileries which they darted at him, in order to stab his reputation, when they were nonplussed in torturing his body, deserved a thunderbolt, but his prayer disarmed the divine justice; it penetrated the Heavens swifter than their malice, and pleaded stronger for pardon than their crimes cried out for vengeance. The divine nature beginning at length to withdraw all sensible consolation from his human nature, his senses became like so many windows to let in sorrow, his eyes began to close, his lips turned pale, his breast was contracted, his breath grew short, and he cried out that *he thirsted*; but, as St. Augustine says, his thirst was rather a spiritual thirst of our salvation; *Sitis tua salus mea*. He thirsted after your conversion, O sinners. Wo be to you, if, like the Jews, you present him with the vinegar and gall of sin, instead of the salutary waters of repentance and the acceptable tears of compunction. The last lesson he preached from the cross was, an instruction to all dying Christians to recommend their departing souls into the hands of their Creator, and to accept of death with an entire conformity and resignation to the divine will; for having fulfilled the law and

the prophecies, and consummated all the ancient types and figures, he recommended his blessed soul into the hands of his heavenly Father, and bowing his head with the most perfect submission and obedience, he laid down his life for our sake.

No sooner did Jesus expire but all nature sunk into an agony, and its entire frame seemed ready to start from its centre; a dreadful earthquake ensued, which caused one of the philosophers of Athens to cry out and say, that either the God of nature was suffering, or that the machine of the world was going to be dissolved. The veil of the temple of Jerusalem, which hung before the sanctuary, was rent from top to bottom, to denote that the figures of the old law were accomplished, and that the sanctuary of Heaven was now laid open to mankind. The sun was eclipsed, and the face of the earth was overspread with darkness; the rocks burst asunder, and the monuments flew open; the captain of the guards, who assisted at the execution, astonished at such wonders, loudly proclaimed that Jesus was the son of the living God, and several of the spectators returned home giving glory to God, and striking their breasts with grief and compassion. And will you, my brethren, be the only part of the creation that will remain insensible? Will you not pay your dear Redeemer some small tribute of piety and gratitude this day? Will you refuse to bathe his bleeding wounds with a few penitential tears? If you do not drop a tear of compassion for your best and dearest friend, will you not weep, at least, for your own crying sins, which were his most cruel executioners, and which made him bleed in the garden, bleed at the pillar, and bleed on the cross? The Patriarch Jacob could not forbear bursting out into tears when he beheld the garment of his son Joseph sprinkled with blood; the people of Rome could not refrain from sighs and lamentations when the blood-dyed robes of Julius Cæsar were exhibited to their view from the rostrum. O Christians, O children of grace and redemption, lift up your eyes and behold, not the robes of a Cæsar, nor the garment of a Joseph, but a striking figure and lively representation of the sacred humanity of your blessed Saviour Jesus Christ. View this crucifix, this image and memorial of him, with true piety. Read this book of the cross, this compendious history of his passion and death, with proper attention. Fix the eyes of your soul devoutly on it, and you will see here in miniature all that I have hitherto endeavoured to delineate. *Ecce homo*; behold the *man of sorrows*; behold how dear your salvation has been to him! Rouse all your feelings, and contemplate in spirit the purple streams flowing from his head, from his hands, from his feet, and from his side, to wash away your iniquities. O sinners, see what your sins have done! See how the king of all glory has been humbled, to cure your pride and vanity! O, what return will you make him this day, for his inestimable and

unparalleled charity! Can you be such monsters of ingratitude, as to continue any longer his enemies after such demonstrations of love? Can you find in your heart to renew his passion, and crucify him over again, by relapsing into fresh mortal sins? Forbid it nature! Forbid it Heaven! O base, O detestable sin! What an odious and foul monster must thou be, since thou hast brought my lovely Jesus to the death of the cross?

O eternal Father, look on the face of thy beloved Son, and for his sake forgive us our sins. Receive his sufferings in satisfaction for our past transgressions, and preserve us from offending thee hereafter. We bow down to the ground with the most profound reverence, O amiable Jesus, and adore, thank and magnify thee, for all thou hast done and suffered for our sake. Vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to give us all thy blessing on this day of mercy, grace and salvation; and grant, that after partaking here of the merits of thy passion and death, we may hereafter partake of the glory of thy resurrection. Which is the happiness I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

EASTER SUNDAY.

On the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Et cum transisset Sabbatum, Maria Magdalena et Maria Jacobi et Salome emerunt aromata, ut venientes ungerent Jesum.

Marc. c. xvi. v. 1.

When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalen and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought perfumes, that coming they might anoint Jesus.

Mark c. xvi. v. 1.

AS all nature was seized with confusion, and touched with compassion on the sorrowful day of our Saviour's bitter passion and death, so, in like manner, all nature was replenished with joy and consolation on the happy day of his glorious resurrection. The sun, which on Good Friday had withdrawn its glittering beams, lest it should behold the Creator of its beauty expiring on an ignominious cross, hastened early in the morning to usher in the day of his resurrection with an extraordinary splendor; Heaven opened its lofty gates, and sent forth an angelical Ambassador, whose robes were as white as the driven snow, to proclaim the signal victory and triumph of the Son of God; the universe was struck with admiration; the sepulchres

flew open, and many dead bodies of the saints who had departed this life, arose out of their graves and appeared to several of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as St. Matthew informs us, c. xxvii. The souls of the holy Patriarchs and Prophets of the old Testament were in raptures of joy to find themselves freed from their tedious captivity. No tongue can describe the comfort that this glorious event gave Mary the blessed mother of Jesus, who, two days before that, had been a most afflicted eye-witness of the bloody tragedy that was acted on Mount Calvary; for if, as the Scripture relates, the Patriot Jacob exulted with joy when he understood that his favourite son Joseph, whom he supposed to be dead, was alive in the kingdom of Egypt, what transports and extasies must the affectionate heart of Mary have felt, when she supposed that her dearly beloved Son Jesus was risen out of the bowels of the earth, clothed with an immortal, impassible and glorified body? The disciples also, who shortly before had been sorely afflicted and plunged into excessive sorrow for the loss of their dear Lord and Master, were most sensibly affected and filled with consolation at the joyful tidings that were announced to them by the devout women who had visited the sepulchre. In a word, the resurrection of Jesus Christ diffused an universal joy through all nature, and caused the Heavens and the earth to resound with sweet alleluias and sacred canticles of adoration, praise and thanksgiving. His enemies alone were confounded and covered with shame. Satan, who in the Scripture language is denominated the Prince of this darkness, lamented to behold himself cast out, and to find his empire overthrown, hell disarmed, sin destroyed, and the world subdued, *not with the sword, but with the wood of the cross*, as St. Augustine speaks. What a noble, what a happy victory, my brethren, which thus threw open the gates of Heaven to mankind? What a grand subject of joy and exultation for all the faithful? My design, however, at present, on this great feast of the triumph of our Lord and Master, is, not to engage your attention with a mere speculative display and contemplation of this sublime mystery, but to propose Mary Magdalen, at the tomb of Jesus Christ, as a model of the most exemplary piety, and to entertain you, not so much with the glory of his resurrection, as with the spirit and religious practices with which you are to honour this sacred mystery. Many of ye have already approached the venerable sacrament of the Altar, and I trust in the mercy of God, that, like Magdalen, ye have had the happiness to find Jesus Christ. If all have not been so fortunate, it is because they did not seek for him with the same ardour and spirit that she did. Learn, then, by the example I shall lay before you, the qualities and conditions of a real and sincere conversion, that if you have been deficient herein, you may, without further delay, rectify your mistakes, correct your defects, and repair the faults of an illusive and pretended conversion. Let us

first implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, addressing her this day with the anthem of the Church, *Regina Cæli lætare, Alleluia, &c.*

To point out the qualities and conditions of a true conversion, and to animate you thereto, I cannot lay before you a more consoling instance of the mercy of God, or a more edifying model of piety, than that of the renowned convert Mary Magdalen. Having expiated her sins by the fervour of her charity, and by a torrent of tears at the feet of her divine Redeemer, she attended him in his sacred passion even when he was forsaken by his disciples. She stood under the cross on Mount Calvary, with weeping eyes, at the time of his crucifixion, was present at his interment, and had the comfort to be the first that saw him after his glorious resurrection. Three characters discover to us her vehement desire to find him. First, her promptitude and haste, whereby she anticipated the rising of the sun. Secondly, the anxiety and disquiet wherewith she was actuated. Thirdly, her courage and intrepidity, whereby she resolved to surmount every obstacle that might hinder her approach to her best beloved master. By these dispositions, which obtained for her the happiness of seeing Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, before all others, you may form a proper judgment of the conversions of this holy time. As to the first, a plain and simple exposition of this day's gospel is the most sensible proof of that holy impatience with which she sought for Jesus Christ. *When the Sabbath was passed*, says the sacred text, *Mary Magdalen bought perfumes to embalm the body of Jesus.* In what anxieties and impetuous desires did she pass the Sabbath day, which, by an indispensable duty, was consecrated to repose? All the authority of the law was requisite to moderate her ardour, and to stay her zeal; nor could she desist, according to St. Luke, c. xxiii. during the repose of her retreat, from preparing the perfumes, with which she intended to embalm the body of Jesus, according to the custom of Jews. Scarce is the sabbath expired, when she takes the road of the sepulchre; she does not expect the rising of the sun, or the first dawn of the morning; her zeal guides her through the darkness of the night, and without listening to the bashful delicacy, or to the fear so natural to her sex, she arrives at the tomb of Jesus Christ before even any of his Apostles. Is it possible to remark a greater promptitude, or a more lively vivacity, to acquit herself of this holy and religious duty?

This, my brethren, is what divine grace requires from you; it demands hearts ready to follow the inspirations and divine attractives with which the Holy Ghost prevents, visits, excites and draws you. Far from this happy disposition are those fluctuating, those uncertain, those irresolute Christians who continually waver, and balance whether they shall forsake their evil ways and convert themselves to the Lord their God, or not; for as he is an infidel who freely and deliberately doubts

of an article of faith, so he that hesitates and deliberates only on penance, is as yet impenitent, and the enemy of God. I own, indeed, that time, and even years are sometimes required to arrive at the summit and perfection of Christian virtue ; but the conversion of the heart is the work of the happy moment, wherein the Holy Ghost suddenly enlightens the soul, and pierces it with a dart that wounds and softens it in the twinkling of an eye. If you, therefore, neglect this favourable time of your visitation ; if you slight this precious moment, and reject this gracious call and invitation to repentance, instead of becoming penitents, you will remain hardened sinners, particularly you who live in the midst of the corruption and vanity of the world ; for, by neglecting to correspond with the favours of Heaven, you render yourselves unworthy of them, and you run the risk of being punished with a subtraction of those graces which you ungratefully slight and reject. In effect, at what other time will God's grace find access to your hearts ? Is it whilst they are full of unlawful pleasures, possessed with ambition, governed by passion and interest, and intoxicated with the love of the corrupted world ? No, my brethren. If, whilst the divine light of the Holy Ghost dawns upon your hearts, you balance, you hesitate, instead of acquiescing to its sweet, its lovely dictates ; if, content with some faint, some imperfect desires of conversion, which only lull you in the sleep of sin, you flatter yourselves that you seek the Lord your God sincerely, be undeceived this day ; it is only illusion, and a deplorable blindness ; for the first mark of a sincere conversion is a promptitude or readiness to follow the dictates of divine grace.

The second mark is an holy anxiety, or an impetuous desire, which animates the soul to return to her Lord and to her God without delay. The Gospel points out to us, in the most lively colours, the anxiety, and the longing desire of Magdalen to find the body of her Saviour. Scarce is the Sabbath finished when her first thought is, who will roll away for her the huge stone that shut the sepulchre ? for she had exactly observed every thing about it, with a design of coming to pay Jesus her last duties ; not out of any human respect, vainly to acknowledge the person who of all the world she was most obliged to ; but out of a most holy impatience to review the only object that her soul loved ; for as soon as she perceived the monument open, and the body gone, her tears testified the sorrows of her soul. She does not sit down, or place herself in any quiet posture, but she is pushed backward and forward by the agitation of her soul. She does not search for the silent alleys or lonely retreats of the adjacent Garden of Olives, to indulge and think upon her grief ; her love fixes her immovably to that now empty sepulchre, where all her joys were laid the third day before. Her eyes perpetually search to see if she can perceive the least remains of the lovely object which she

regrets. The Apostles, who were now, likewise, come to search for their Lord and Master, not finding his body, returned back from whence they came. It was enough for them, says St. Augustine, to see he was not there; but it was not enough for the soul of Mary, languishing with divine love; she stays there alone, and becomes obstinate in searching for her Jesus; she will absolutely find him where he is not; she has already looked several times into the monument, but she still makes herself believe that her eyes have deceived her. She stoops again, and again, and devours the obscure mansion with her eyes. Nothing can escape her diligence. At length two Angels appear to her, clothed with light. Every other person would be charmed, would be dazzled at the glorious sight, and forget all other cares; but nothing can compensate Mary for the loss of her Jesus, whom she cannot find. The Angels say to her, *Woman, why dost thou weep?* But she answers, O! when you shall be acquainted with the cause of my tears, you will acknowledge that I am the most miserable of women. I weep, *because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him.* I lament, because they have taken away my master, and with him my joy, my life, my repose, my treasure, and I don't know where to seek for him.

It is just after this manner that a sincere penitent speaks, when truly touched with a desire of finding God whom he lost by sin. He that before accounted as nothing the losing of the grace of God, begins now to be sensible of the miserable state of his conscience. He is now astonished how it is possible for a Christian to live without the favour and friendship of the Lord. He now perceives that the commerce of the world, a life of dissipation and pleasures, an enchainment of temporal occupations, a constant circle of vain amusements, an unhappy criminal passion, an unwearied ardor to gain the tinselled prosperity and perishable riches of this life, a set of evil companions and associates, have made him forget his God, and thrown him into a mortal lethargy with regard to Heaven and his salvation. He then bursts out into the most lively and pungent regrets; he cries out with Magdalen, *They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have placed him.* Alas! I have hitherto lived as if there was no God for me. Is it not possible for me to return, once more, to that happy state wherein God was my father, my friend, and my delight. He exclaims with the Prophet Isaias, c. xxii. *Recedite a me, amare flebo; Retire from me, O you vain amusements, you frivolous pleasures, you idle affairs; disappear and give way to the great, to the only important affair of my salvation.* O worldly vanities, you have but too long consumed my time and captivated my heart. Leave me now, that I may at leisure regret a loss which my tears only are able to repair. Such is the language, such are the sentiments of a true convert. He don't seek for an easy, for an

indulgent director to smooth over his crimes and doze his conscience. The most circumspect, the most vigilant, and the most charitable, scarce appears to him capable of rolling away the huge stone, and removing the mountain of sin, whose insupportable weight lies so heavy upon his conscience. He cries out, like Magdalen, *Quis revolvat, &c. Who will roll away the huge stone that shuts the sepulchre?* O where shall I find the man of God who will soften the hardness of my heart? He is not satisfied, as heretofore, with a slight, superficial examination of his conscience; he looks narrowly into the most secret folds and hidden recesses of his heart; he probes the wounds of his soul to the very bottom. Like Mary Magdalen, he stoops and carefully views the dark abode, that nothing may escape unnoticed or go unpunished. Hence it is, that we have sometimes the consolation to find those persons, whose consciences were heretofore seared and hardened, acquire, in process of time, delicacies of conscience which we do not usually find even in the just. They enter into an holy disquiet for the present state of their souls; they are never satisfied with themselves; they imagine that they can never explain themselves as fully as they ought; that they can never sufficiently regret the disorders of their past life, nor take sufficient precautions to guard against sin for the future. This is generally the case of those who are sincerely converted to God, especially after being entangled in great disorders, and involved in criminal habits. The beginnings of their conversions are usually accompanied by the like agitations and troubles; for, as St. Augustine remarks, a sinner does not disengage himself but with difficulty from what he loved with ardency, and this is the very foundation of the many heroic acts of contrition by which the character of a true Gospel penitent is so easily discovered. But let us return to our model. Whilst Mary Magdalen remained, all bathed in tears, at the tomb of Jesus Christ, the Son of God presented himself to her under the form of a gardener. Her grief inspires her with a respect uncommon for persons in this line of life, perhaps to engage him to discover to her the body of her Lord, which she seeks for. She says to him, *Pray, Sir, have you taken him away? tell me where you have placed him*, John, c. xx. But Magdalen, who do you speak of? *Him?* What is the name of the person you seek for? Alas! your love makes you imagine that every heart is as full of your Divine Master as your own, and that every one should know whom you inquire for. But, O great misfortune! there are few, and very few, comparatively speaking, who think seriously of the Lord their God, or have his love thus fixed in their hearts. But Magdalen, what will it avail you to know where he is? What is your design? *O! I will take him from thence*, said she; I will put him in a place of safety, and hereafter not hazard the losing of my Jesus any more. I will again wash with my tears those sacred feet, where I first found

the remission of my sins. I will contemplate, at leisure, that divine mouth from whence so many heavenly oracles have proceeded, and which gave me life in pronouncing the sentence of my absolution. But, Mary, do you reflect upon what you say? You are alone, a weak woman, without help and assistance, and yet you pretend to take away from the bosom of the tomb, and from the centre of death, the body which a strong guard of soldiers is watching. Yes, yes, *I will take him away*, said she; conduct me but where it is; leave the rest to myself. I do not fear either the guards, or the darkness of the night, or the weakness of my sex. I do not matter my life, after having lost my Saviour; and I think nothing difficult, nothing impossible, so I can but find him once more.

Behold, my brethren, the natural image of a true penitent, moved and touched by the grace of the Almighty God. Nothing can obstruct the vivacity of his pious designs. The devil, the world, and the flesh, appear weak and impotent enemies to him. He that heretofore dreaded every thing, now becomes intrepid and undaunted. He renounces with pleasure the dangerous company of those persons without whom life seemed before bitter and tasteless. He perceives the faint sparkles of profane love expiring in his breast, and feels the ardours of a pure and holy love inflaming his heart. He begins to love the only object that deserves to be loved, and tramples under foot the unhappy object which before he blindly preferred to it. He submits cheerfully to the sweet yoke of the Gospel, which before seemed so difficult; and he is willing to observe the fasts of the Church, which heretofore appeared insupportable to the pretended delicacy of his constitution. He is ready to practise all the duties of a Christian; to make restitution of the wealth he unjustly acquired, to repair the scandal he has given, to recal the detractions and calumnies he has spread, and to lay aside the enmity and resentment he harboured in his breast. Nothing appears superior to the love he feels for his God; but every thing seems light, easy and sweet, provided he does but regain his friendship. The world is now nothing to him; he is convinced of its delusive vanity; he despises its applauses, its censures and raileries, and resolves not to sacrifice his salvation any longer to a phantom of human respect. In fine, whatever it costs him, he is determined to seek the Lord his God without delay, and to serve him only. It is thus that Magdalen instructs you, my brethren, this day, to seek and to search for the Lord your God, when you have unhappily lost him by sin; and if you search for him with the same spirit and ardour that she did, you will surely find the arms of his tender mercy open to embrace you. When she could no longer enjoy the visible presence of her Divine Redeemer, who possessed her whole heart, she sequestered herself from the dangerous society of the world, lest any thing should divert her thoughts from the only

object that could give her any comfort or satisfaction. And though she had the happiness to hear the sentence of her absolution pronounced by Jesus Christ himself in person, yet this did not hinder her from bewailing her past irregularities, in the bitterness of her soul, as long as she lived, because her love told her that she could never sufficiently bewail and lament her former disorders, nor guard too carefully against sin for the future. For this reason she devoted the remainder of her life to sighs, to tears, to prayer, and to every exercise of divine love and charity, whereby she became a great favourite of Heaven, and a perfect model of penance to all succeeding ages.

Learn then, Christian penitents, by her example, what steps you are to take in order to recover the grace of God, and what precautions are necessary to preserve this grace when you have once happily recovered it. Like unto Magdalen, retain always a grateful sense of God's goodness to you, and beware of ever relapsing into any of your past disorders. Shun all the dangerous occasions of sin, and embrace voluntary practices of penance, in order to satisfy the justice of an offended Deity. Bewail your ingratitude as long as you live, and continue both day and night to beseech the God of mercy, with the Royal Prophet, Psalm 1. *to wash you still more from your iniquity, and to cleanse you from your former sins.* Inspire us, O loving Jesus, with the like penitential sentiments. Let us no longer be deceived with the shadow of repentance; but grant us all the gift of a sincere conversion, and the acceptable dispositions of a contrite and humble heart, that, like the happy Magdalen, we may be entitled to hear these words of comfort pronounced in our favour, *Thy sins are forgiven thee; thy faith has saved thee; go in peace,* St. Luke, c. vii. This is the blessing which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

EASTER MONDAY.

On the Resurrection of our Lord.

Jesus quaeritis Nazarenum crucifixum. Surrexit, non est hic.

Marc. c. xvi. v. 6.

You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here.

Mark, c. xvi. v. 6.

AS Angels proclaimed to the world the nativity of Jesus Christ, so they announced to the devout women at the sepulchre the joyful news of his glorious resurrection. *You seek,*

said an Heavenly messenger, *Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here.* His glory was veiled by his humility, and concealed in the obscurity of his birth in the manger, and of his sufferings and ignominious death on the cross; but it is displayed in the mystery of his resurrection. The ignominies of his death are repaired, his labours are crowned, his divinity is manifested, his humility exalted, his wisdom unfolded, his religion established, his doctrine confirmed and built upon an unshaken foundation.

The Heavens and the earth were filled with unspeakable joy and triumph at this glorious event, and justly resounded with canticles of adoration, praise and thanksgiving, since Jesus Christ, by forsaking the mansions of the dead, and rising glorious from his tomb, has demonstrated his divinity, fulfilled the prophecies, verified his own predictions, disarmed hell, overthrown the empire of Satan, triumphed over sin and death, opened for mankind the gates of life everlasting, and plainly indicated that his members shall also rise from their graves at the end of the world, to follow him, and to be united to him as their head, and the first-born and first fruits of the dead.

From being slaves, under a worse than an Egyptian bondage, he has restored us to the liberty of the children of God; he has merited for us a right to partake of his immortality, and a title to the full possession of the true Land of Promise, the Kingdom of Heaven. As he died for our sins, so *he rose again for our justification*, as the Apc.tle says, Rom. c. iv. v. 25. His resurrection, therefore, is the confirmation of our faith, the accomplishment of our redemption, and the foundation of our hope, that we shall one day rise from death to a life of immortal glory. However to partake of the benefits and advantages he has procured us by this great mystery, our spiritual resurrection must be conformable to his resurrection; for as his resurrection is the pledge of future resurrection, so it must likewise be the model of our resurrection from the grave of sin to a new life of grace and virtue. Two faults are generally to be found in our spiritual resurrection; first, that it is not always true and sincere; the second, that it is not constant and permanent. Jesus Christ teaches us by his resurrection to guard against these two illusions, for he rose truly from the dead to die no more; his resurrection was real. This discovers the falsehood of our spiritual resurrection, and shall be the subject of the first point. His resurrection was constant and permanent; this should make us tremble for the inconstancy of our spiritual resurrection, and shall be the subject of the second point, and the entire plan of the following discourse. Let us previously invoke the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed mother of Jesus, congratulating her on the resurrection of her beloved Son, with the anthem of the Church, *Regina Coeli laetare, Alleluia, &c.*

St. Paul, being sensible that mankind would never receive the austere morals of the Gospel, nor embrace the incomprehensible mysteries of the Christian faith, unless they were persuaded that they should obtain in the world to come a grand recompence for their obedience in this, took care to prove our Saviour's resurrection, with arguments capable of convincing the most incredulous. He appeared, says that great Apostle, to Peter, then to eleven of the disciples, then to James, and to all the rest of the Apostles, afterwards to more than five hundred of the faithful assembled together. Now if Christ be truly risen from the dead as he evidently proved, it follows by a necessary consequence that he is truly the Son of God ; his doctrine, therefore, is from Heaven ; the promises and menaces he makes us are certain ; the punishments and recompences he assures us of, are infallible, and of course we are to believe that we shall rise again with the same body and soul, to receive the sentence of eternal justice or mercy. It is, then, a matter of great importance for us to examine carefully if we have truly forsaken the grave of our iniquities, as Christ did forsake the grave of death, because the truth of his resurrection must serve as a mirror and model for us to discover the truth of our spiritual resurrection, and to prove the sincerity of our repentance at this holy time. First, then, Jesus Christ arose from the tomb where the Jews had buried him. Secondly, he appeared several times to his disciples, and in a palpable manner. Thirdly, he confirmed by sensible actions the appearance he made. It is from these circumstances you are to judge of the truth of your spiritual resurrection, and to learn whether your conversion be true or false. Three days were partly spent whilst Christ remained shut up in the sepulchre ; his disciples had almost lost all hopes of seeing him again ; the Jewish synagogue rejoiced to be delivered from one whom they looked upon as their most dangerous enemy, and in placing sentinels about his tomb they thought themselves secure ; when, on a sudden there happened a dreadful earthquake, and an Angel in flames of glory descended from the Heavens, opened the monument, astonished those that were present, and prostrated the guards on the ground. Behold here a clear proof that Jesus Christ rose from the bowels of the earth, and came to life by his own power and virtue. His divinity, until then eclipsed, was displayed and manifested by the reunion of his soul and body ; his power, which until then he restrained, was signalized by his victory over death ; and the guards themselves who had been ordered to watch him became spectators of his glorious triumph. Behold now, the instruction we are to draw from this mystery. Jesus Christ rose truly and in reality ; his resurrection was not merely apparent or fantastical, like that of Samuel, but a real re-union of his soul and body. In like manner, we must rise truly from the death of sin to the life of grace, by a real and sincere repentance, if we expect to rise hereafter to

an immortal life of glory; we must imitate the corporal resurrection of Jesus, and, as Tertullian speaks, become as it were, the genuine copies and images of it. It is not sufficient to rise only in outward appearance, or to approach the sacraments of reconciliation at this holy time with a seeming devotion, or an outward shew of religion. Such exterior marks of repentance may indeed blindfold the world, and make us imagine ourselves reconciled to God, at the same time that we are, perhaps, his most declared enemies. But all this glittering outside will not justify us in the sight of Him, who is the searcher of hearts, nor entitle us to the blessing that Christ has merited for us by his resurrection, unless we rise by a real solid and inward conversion of our hearts, according to that saying of St. Paul, *Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee.*

We are not to be startled at the imaginary difficulties, nor daunted at the hardships that may seem to stand in our way; we are not to cry out with anxiety like the pious women mentioned in the Gospel, who ran, indeed, with spices early in the morning to our Saviour's tomb; but remembering that a large stone was fixed against the door of it, said to each other, *Who will roll back for us the stone?* Let us rather, my brethren, go on with courage like them, and we shall find all obstacles speedily removed; we shall find that virtue has its sweets and comforts, and that the name of Penance is more shocking and ungrateful to the ear of nature, than the thing is really in itself. The grace of God will lend us an helping hand, and enable us to surmount all difficulties, not only without pain but even with pleasure, provided we do but faithfully co-operate with it, and labour in earnest to execute our pious resolutions, without dallying or delaying our conversion from day to day.

When our Divine Redeemer rose from the dead, he rose very early in the morning, as the Gospel informs us; he rose speedily, one only day intervening between the day of his death and the day of his resurrection. Hereby we are taught, that we are not to put off our spiritual resurrection, but to open the grave of our conscience by a timely confession, and to rise early and speedily out of the melancholy state of mortal sin by a true and hearty contrition. Moreover, when Christ rose from the dead, he left behind him in the monument the linen clothes wherein his body had been wrapped up, and the napkin that was tied about his sacred head. Hereby we are taught, that if we have a mind to rise truly and to resemble him in his resurrection, we must break loose from the chains of sin and the fetters of iniquity, which have hitherto held us captive. We must throw off our vicious habits, cast away the works of darkness, and divest ourselves of those darling passions which have so long deprived us of the liberty of the children of God. We must lay aside those vain and immodest dresses

which render us slaves to ourselves, slaves to others, victims to pride, and preys to Satan. We must quit those disorderly places, fly those pestilential houses, drop those private conversations, shun those dangerous assemblies, and forsake those bad companies where our morals have been corrupted, our virtue has been tarnished, our innocence has been lost, and which have proved the first fatal cause of our spiritual shipwreck and ruin. We must, in fine, die to sin and to a sensual life, burying the old man with all his works, and putting on the new man, in order to begin a new life and live hereafter as the children of light, sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ, so as to be able to say with truth, of ourselves, what St. Paul said of himself after his conversion, *Vivo ego, jam non ego* ; I lead a new life ; I am no longer what I have been ; I am no more the same person I was ; the old things are passed away, behold all things are made new ; I was once darkness, but now light in the Lord ; by the power and efficacy of his grace I have passed over from darkness to light, from iniquity to justice, from the death of sin to a life of grace ; *I live, now not I, but Christ loveth in me*, and has his dwelling-place within my soul. O, thrice happy Christians ! who rise from the grave of sin, and are thus converted at this holy time, and whose words and actions, whose edifying piety and exemplary conduct, stand as witnesses of the sincerity of their spiritual resurrection, and proclaim Jesus Christ truly risen in their souls.

This is the first lesson we learn from his resurrection. He appeared several times to his disciples to confirm their faith, and convince them of the truth of his appearance by his actions, giving us thereby to understand, that our resurrection must be proved and rendered authentic by actions, and by works of sanctity and justice. Magdalen, who, overwhelmed with grief, came to the monument early in the morning to seek her beloved, was the first he favoured with an appearance, because she was the most diligent in seeking him. Next came Peter, who bathed in tears, with the well-beloved disciple, St. John : He afterwards manifested himself to the rest of the disciples. One of them, more incredulous than the rest, refused to believe the resurrection of his Divine Master, unless he put his hand into his side, and his fingers into his wounds. This was no sooner granted but he loudly confessed him to be God and man. He was likewise pleased to give them several other proofs of his resurrection, and to explain to them the difficult passages of the Scripture, in terms so sweet and heavenly, that their hearts were filled with all the ardour of divine love, and a zeal intrepid enough to convert all the known nations of the world. Thus it is, my brethren, that we are to prove the truth of our spiritual resurrection, and the sincerity of our conversion, by the practice of good works. We must also prove it by our constancy and perseverance. This is the second lesson we are to learn from the resurrection of our Saviour, who rose to die no

more, but to live an immortal and unalterable life, as I will shew ye in the second point. Jesus Christ died by man's cruelty, and he rose from death by his own power. The one was an argument of his infinite love, the other of his omnipotence; the one a proof of his humanity, the other a work of his divinity, and both together the cause of a perfect and plentiful redemption; for as he was willing to die for our sins, so he rose again for our justification, to apply to our souls the fruits of his passion, to strengthen our faith, to animate our hope, to inflame our charity, and to teach us how we are to rise to a new life of grace here, and to an immortal life of glory hereafter. He died once for the salvation of man; says St. Paul, and he will live eternally for the glory of his heavenly Father; for having conquered death, he is no more to be its victim; first, because he contains in himself the principle of life; and secondly, because he was willing to deprive the Jews of all power to make any further attempt against his person. By expiring on the cross his divinity appeared, as it were, eclipsed; but by his resurrection it shined in all its lustre, not unlike the sun, when it darts its brilliant rays through a thick eloud, and diffuses its splendor on every side with great magnificence. It effaced the obscurity and ignominy of his death in such a manner, that the Apostle says, every thing was renewed in this mystery; and if Jesus Christ was before believed to be man by his death, he is at present known to be God by his immortality.

However, though he possesses in himself a glorious immortality, he is still willing to enjoy another immortality in our hearts. Can we, then, be so ungrateful to him, or so blind to our own eternal welfare, as to defeat the designs of his mercy, and refuse him a permanent possession of our hearts? Can we be so impious, or so cruel to our own souls, as to renew the ignominy of his passion, and crucify him over again by relapsing into sin, at the very time we pretend to celebrate the solemnity of his resurrection? *Death has no longer any dominion over him*; it can never touch the splendor he has re-assumed, unless you make him die in your hearts by mortal sin. Ought we not, my brethren, to redouble our vigilance at this holy time in guarding against future relapses, and preserving the possession of a God, who alone can support and strengthen us against our natural weakness and inconstancy? Such are the sentiments, such are the dispositions that the present solemnity demands of every one of us, it being the Pasch or the Passover of Christians, prefigured by the ancient Passover of the Jews, and designed by God's mercy, for all sinners to pass over, by a true repentance, from the bondage of sin to the liberty of the children of God, and to purge out the old leaven in order to become a new mass, or begin a new life with Jesus Christ, now risen from the dead. This is what St. Paul so earnestly

recommends, Cor. i. 5, *Now our Pasch is immolated ; now our Paschal Lamb, Jesus Christ, is sacrificed ; now he has delivered us from the bondage of the infernal Pharao ; now he has opened a passage for us to the true Land of Promise, through the Red Sea of his precious blood ; wherefore, let us feast, not in the old leaven of dissimulation, nor in the leaven of malice and wickedness, but in the unleavened things of sincerity and truth. Let us renounce all impiety and worldly desires, and live soberly, justly and piously ; not in rioting or drunkenness, not in chambering or impurities, not in contention or emulation, but put on Jesus Christ. Let this holy solemnity be for us a real Passover from vice to virtue ; from the galling yoke and servitude of Satan, to the sweet liberty of the children of God ; and from the dismal death of sin, to a permanent life of grace. This was the end of Christ's sufferings and of his resurrection, and ought to be our greatest concern at this holy time ; for to relapse and to go on still in sin, if it be not a reproach to his passion and resurrection, it is an argument at least, of our having no part in it. And what state can be more miserable than for Christians to be found still captives and slaves of sin, after Christ has given his blood for their ransom, and rose from the dead for their justification ? As the Angel, therefore, said to Mary Magdalen, when she was weeping at the tomb, and looking for Christ among the dead, *You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified : He is risen, he is not here ;* so the state of every Christian ought to be such at Easter, that it may be likewise said of him with truth, *He is risen, he is not here.* He is no more to be met with in those dangerous assemblies, and disorderly houses, where he lost his innocence ; he is no longer engaged in scandalous intrigues ; he is no longer a slave to his unruly passions ; he is divested of his vicious habits ; he lies no longer buried in the state or affection of mortal sin ; *he is risen* by a true repentance, he is become a new man, he leads a new life, he is wonderfully changed for the better, and reclaimed from his evil ways.*

It was on the like happy change that St. Paul formerly congratulated the Corinthians, when he said, *You have been sinners, but now you are washed in the blood of the immaculate Lamb ; now you are sanctified, now you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ; you have been darkness, but now you are light in the Lord ;* walk therefore as children of the light. Would to God I could congratulate you all, this day, on the like happy conversion ! Such a change and amendment of life is the most convincing proof that repenting sinners can give of the reality of their spiritual resurrection, and the sincerity of their conversion at this holy time. On the contrary, those who take no pains to reform their lives, but continue after Easter, the same fickle, inconstant sinners that they were before Easter, replunging into their former disorders, and returning like

dogs to their vomit; such relapsing sinners, I say, have but too much reason to suspect the reality of their spiritual resurrection and the sincerity of their conversion; for, as St. Augustine says, where there is no amendment or change of life, the *repentance is vain and imaginary*; wherefore he exhorts all Easter communicants in these words, O penitents, if you have a mind to be true Gospel penitents, and not dissemblers and mockers of your God, mend your lives; renounce those detestable vices which render you a scandal to your family, a reproach to religion and a disgrace to Christianity. It is hereby that it must appear whether you are truly risen out of the grave of sin, and have complied with your Easter duty or not; for as a good tree is known by the fruits it produces, so it is by the fruits of your conversion that a true judgment may be formed of its sincerity. If you bring forth the worthy fruits of repentance; if you reform your lives, curb your passions, shun the dangerous occasions of sin, and be punctual in the discharge of the duties of your state, there is reason to believe that you are spiritually risen with Jesus Christ, and to hope that you will hereafter partake of the glorious resurrection of the just; but if you run immediately in the same dangerous occasions of sin, and yield to the same temptations as often after Easter as before; if you imitate those brutish animals which rise only for a short time out of the mire, and after shaking themselves lie down again to wallow and roll in their favourite filth and pastiness, it is an evident sign that your resurrection was only a phantom, and that your souls lie still buried in the sepulchre of sin, and are dead in the sight of God, though, perhaps, you have approached the Easter Communion with the outward appearance of a true penitent. We may say of such penitents, what the Patriarch Isaac said to his son Jacob when he came to ask his blessing, clothed with the fragrant garments of his brother Esau, *The voice, indeed, seems to be the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau*; for, to consider the fair promises and verbal protestations that relapsing sinners make at the tribunal of Penance, they appear to be children of benediction like Jacob; but their hands, that is, their works and actions, prove them to be children of malediction, like Esau, lying in the grave of sin, and likely to be buried in it for ever.

Preserve all my hearers from the like misfortune, O sweetest Jesus, we prostrate ourselves before the throne of thy mercy; we adore thee on this day of thy glorious triumph, and gratefully celebrate thy resurrection with sweet alleluias and sacred canticles of joy and thanksgiving. Fill our hearts we beseech thee, with that spiritual joy which is one of the happy fruits of thy Divine Spirit. Give us grace to rise with thee truly and sincerely, to rise with thee everlastingly, that after imitating thy resurrection, and being influenced with the sacred fire of thy divine love here we may enjoy the splendor of thy glory

hereafter. Inspire us with the tender sentiments and dispositions of the two disciples who meeting thee on the way to the Castle of Emmaus pressed thee to stay with them, as the day was almost spent and the night was approaching. Stay with us, likewise, we beseech thee, O Divine Redeemer. The number of our days will be shortly completed, and the night of death is approaching fast. What shall become of us if thou art not with us at that tremendous hour? O do not forsake or abandon us then, but stand by us and protect us, that being sheltered under the wings of thy mercy our souls may be wafted to the charming mansions of bliss, there to sing thy immortal praises for the whole length of a never ending eternity. Which is the blessing that I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.



LOW SUNDAY.

On the Institution and Nature of the Sacrament of Penance.

Accipite Spiritum Sanctum Quorum remisieritis peccata remittuntur eis, et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.—*Jo. c. xx. v. 23.*

Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven unto them, and whose soever sins ye shall retain, they are retained.

St. John, c. xx. v. 23.

AS the paternal providence of God has provided remedies for healing the distempers of our bodies, so, in like manner, his boundless mercy has provided remedies for healing the spiritual disorders of our sinful souls. For the remission of original sin, which we inherit from our first parents, our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of Baptism, whereby we are delivered from the bondage of Satan, and made the adoptive children of God and heirs of life everlasting. For the remission of the actual and personal sins, which we ourselves commit after baptism, he instituted the Sacrament of Penance, whereby repenting sinners, who have unhappily forfeited their innocence after having been cleansed and sanctified in the laver of baptism, may be reconciled again and reinstated in the grace of God, provided they sue for it with proper dispositions. Penance is therefore called the *second plank after shipwreck*, inasmuch as those who have had the misfortune to make a shipwreck of

their baptismal sanctity, and to split upon the rock of mortal sin, may still escape, by seizing on the plank of penance, and may be safely conducted, by the help of it, through the stormy sea of this world, into the desired harbour of eternal bliss. Thus the Lord our God, who is rich in mercy, and who knows the frailty of our nature and our proneness to evil from our very infancy, has vouchsafed to provide suitable remedies for all our spiritual necessities, and has left nothing undone that was necessary for our eternal salvation. Had our Divine Redeemer not left a sacrament in his Church, for the remission of the sins that are committed after baptism, as well as he did for the remission of sins committed before it, what would become of the generality of Christians? For how few are there of the adult who inviolably preserve their baptismal innocence, without falling into some sin? If there was no other remedy, no other sacrament for the remission of sin but baptism, how could the sins which they fall into after their baptism be forgiven? And if they lived and died under the guilt of such sins, how could they expect to be saved and admitted into the holy city of the heavenly Jerusalem? since, as the Scripture assures us, *there shall not enter in it any thing that is defiled*, Apocalypse, c. xxi. v. 27.

Thanks be to Heaven, my brethren, we have been brought up in a religious persuasion that does not exclude us from the benefit of a sacrament, which is necessary, at least in desire, when it cannot be actually received, for the remission of actual mortal sins, as baptism is for the remission of original sin. The very Apostles' Creed, teaches us, that Christ our Lord has left a power in the Holy Catholic Church to forgive sins in his name, and by his authority; and the Gospel informs us that he himself exercised this power on several occasions; nay, we read in chap. ix. of St. Matthew, that he wrought an illustrious miracle in favour of a man who was ill of a palsy, in order to convince the incredulous Jews that he *had a power to forgive sins on earth*, whereupon the multitude that was present *glorified God for having given such power to men*. That Christ, who, as man, first received this power from his heavenly Father, imparted it afterwards to his Apostles, and to the Pastors of his Church as their lawful successors and his representatives and substitutes on earth, will appear in the sequel of the following discourse, wherein I purpose, with the assistance of God, to treat of the institution and nature of the Sacrament of Penance. In the first point I will shew you, that penance is a sacrament of divine institution, established by Jesus Christ in the new Law, as a necessary means to obtain pardon of the sins committed after baptism. In the second point, I will lay before you the nature of this sacrament, and the dispositions which must necessarily accompany it. Let us previously explore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed mother of Jesus, greeting her in the words of the Angel Gabriel, *Ave Maria*.

Penance may be considered either as a virtue, or as a sacrament. The virtue of penance consists in an inward grief and sorrow of heart for having offended God, with an hatred and detestation of the sins committed, because they are displeasing to God's infinite goodness; it essentially includes a firm purpose of amendment, and a desire or will to satisfy the Divine Justice. Penance in this consideration, or as a virtue only, and its principal act which is contrition of heart, has been always necessary even in the old Law, to obtain the forgiveness of sin, as the Council of Trent says, Sess. 14. c. 4. but the necessity of the Sacrament of Penance only commenced with the promulgation of the Gospel after our Saviour's resurrection, when he raised the virtue of Penance to the dignity of one of the seven Sacraments of the new Law, and made, as it were, a spiritual bath of the blood he shed on the cross, together with the penitential tears of repenting sinners, for the purpose of washing away the blackest stains of their sins. It is from the merits of his passion and death that it derives this wonderful virtue and efficacy; no sinner is excluded from the benefit of it, let his crimes be ever so enormous or ever so numerous, provided he has recourse to it with the necessary dispositions; for as, according to the Gospel of St. John, c. v. the pond of Jerusalem, called in Latin the *Probatica*, in Hebrew *Bethsaida*, and in Greek *Bethchesda*, that is, the *House of Mercy*, healed the blind, the lame, sick and infirm, of all sorts of distempers whatsoever, when the *Angel of the Lord* descended into it to put the water in motion; so in like manner the sacrament of Penance, which the pond of Jerusalem prefigured, heals all the distempers of a sinful soul, and effaces the penitent's sins, though they should happen to be as red as scarlet, as black as ink, and as numerous as the sands of the sea, when it is duly received and properly applied by the *ministers of the Lord* and the pastors of the Church.

It is true, the power of forgiving sins properly belongs to God alone, as the power of working miracles belongs only to him. No one upon earth can therefore forgive sins by his own power or private authority, either in the Sacrament of Baptism or of Penance, as no one upon earth can, by his own power raise the dead to life; but as God has been often pleased to communicate the power of raising the dead to life, to men, as his instruments, so he has been pleased to communicate to men, as his instruments, the power of forgiving sins in his name and by his authority. He made Moses, Aaron, Elias, and Elisæus in the old Law, and the Apostles in the new Law, the instruments of his power to raise the dead to life, and work a great number of stupendous miracles, which surpassed all human power. In like manner he has empowered the pastors of his Church, as his instruments, though they are men and sinners themselves, to absolve and forgive such sin-

ners as truly repent, and have recourse to the tribunal of his mercy with the necessary dispositions. That Christ our Lord solemnly promised to communicate this power to men, is evident from St. Matt. c. xviii. v. 18. where he said to his Apostles, and of course to their descendants who were to succeed them in the ministry to the end of time, *Amen, I say unto ye, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be also loosed in Heaven.* The same promise he made at another time to Peter, the Apostle, in St. Matt. c. xvi. v. 19. saying, *To thee I will give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in Heaven.* This promise of giving the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and communicating the power of binding and loosing, was fulfilled by our Blessed Saviour after his resurrection; for, as we read in the Gospel of this day, he appeared to the disciples, and standing in the midst of them, he imparted to them a double blessing of peace, and said, *As my Father has sent me, even so I send you; that is, I invest you with the same power and authority with which I am invested, and consequently with the power of absolving and forgiving penitent sinners, which Christ undoubtedly had. Then he breathed upon them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.* It was then, chiefly, that he instituted Penance as a Sacrament of peace and reconciliation, to convey into the heart of a Christian penitent that true, solid and happy peace, which is the result of a sincere conversion, and one of the fruits of the *Holy Ghost*. It was then, in short, that the Son of God, committed the power of forgiving sins, not to the persons of the Apostles only, but to their office, that is to them and their successors in office, the Bishops and Priests who would be duly authorized to exercise the sacred functions of the ministry after the death of the Apostles; for as they were not to continue very long upon earth, and as the Church was not to die with them, but to stand unto the very end of the world in defiance of the gates of hell, it is manifest that the commission given to the Apostles was not confined to their persons, but was to descend to their lawful successors, and remain with them till the very end of the world.

In virtue of the commission thus given by Jesus Christ to the pastors of the Church, they remit or retain the sins of those who, after submitting themselves to the authority of the Church by baptism, humbly submit themselves again to her spiritual jurisdiction, in order to obtain forgiveness of the sins whereby they have defiled the white robe of their innocence, violated the sanctity of their baptism, and transgressed the laws of the Gospel. The sentence of absolution which is pronounced on this occasion, is to be looked upon as pro-

nounced by God himself, since every thing that is transacted in this sacred tribunal is performed in his name, and by his divine authority. Whilst the priest outwardly exercises the function, and gives the absolution, it is Christ, the invisible High Priest and principal cause of our justification, that interiorly absolves the penitent, forgives him his sins, and grants the inward sanctifying graces that justify him; for as it is Christ that purifies the soul in baptism by the ministry of the priest, so it is he that purifies the soul in the Sacrament of Penance, by the absolution of the priest. It is he that signs and seals our pardon, and ratifies the sentence in Heaven, which is imparted to us by his representatives on earth. The power committed to them is therefore so far from being derogatory or injurious to the honour of God, that it redounds very much to his honour and glory, and serves to excite us to a most grateful acknowledgment of his boundless mercy, in having provided us with so effectual a means to make our peace with him; it is also so far from promoting sin, or being an encouragement to a sinner to persevere in his iniquity, upon the confidence of being absolved whenever he pleases, that on the contrary, the Catholic doctrine of absolution, rightly understood, is the greatest curb to sin, puts the severest restraints on corrupt nature, and contributes wonderfully to prevent future relapses, and to promote the practice of virtue; for though the pastors of the Church have a power to absolve all true penitents, yet they have no power to absolve any sinner, though an Emperor or crowned Head, unless he sincerely repents of his sins, and has a firm purpose of a new life. They are commanded, under pain of incurring God's indignation, not to cast the pearls before the swine; not to administer the holy things to such as continually return, like dogs to their vomit; not to impart the benefit of absolution to sinners who bring no signs of true repentance, who refuse to make restitution of ill-gotten goods, to repair the injuries they have done to their neighbour, to retract the calumnies they have spread, to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, to forsake their evil habits, or to comply with any part of their duty that binds under pain of mortal sin.

Confession itself is a great and salutary act of self-humiliation, which conduces very much to the reclaiming of sinners, as daily experience teaches, by the great number of conversions which are owing to it. The necessity of confession appears evidently, from the commission that Christ gave to the pastors of the Church; for, as he invested them with power to bind and loose, to forgive and retain sins, according to the merits of the cause and the dispositions of the penitent, it follows, by a necessary consequence, that he also laid an obligation upon the faithful to declare their sins, in order to have them remitted or retained; for, otherwise, how should the pastors of the Church be able to execute this commission, or

exercise the power given them? How should they know what sins are to be forgiven, and what sins are to be retained, unless the sinner be under an obligation of laying open the true state of his soul by a candid confession? How could they be able to distinguish between leprosy and leprosy? How could they know what advice is to be given, or what remedy is to be applied, unless they be first informed of the cause, and duly acquainted with the nature of the distemper? Surely, a judge must have a full knowledge of the cause, and a physician must know the disorder; the one to pronounce a just sentence, the other to prescribe suitable remedies. Hence St. Augustine says, Homil. 49, that to pretend that it is sufficient to confess to God alone, is to destroy the commission of Christ, who established a penitential court for hearing the sinners' cause, and who constituted the pastors of his church the judges of mens' consciences, and the spiritual physicians of their souls. It is, continues this holy doctor, to contradict the Gospel, and to make void the power of the keys; because the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, which were given to the Church, would be useless, and the power of retaining sins would be void, if such sins as exclude from the kingdom of Heaven could be readily remitted, independently of the keys given to the Church. May I not, then, conclude, that penance is justly ranked in the number of the seven Sacraments of the new Law? especially, as it appears clearly from what has been hitherto said, that it has all the requisites to a sacrament; it being *an outward visible, or sensible sign of an inward invisible grace, instituted by Jesus Christ for the sanctification of our souls*, which is the very definition of a sacrament. *The outward visible, or sensible sign*, is found in the penitent's confession, and in the form of absolution on the part of the priest. *The inward invisible grace*, thereby signified, is the forgiveness of sins; and *the institution of Jesus Christ* is manifest from the gospel of this day. Let us now briefly consider the nature of this sacrament, and the dispositions that must necessarily accompany it.

Besides the absolution on the part of the minister of Christ, there are three other parts that constitute and complete the sacrament of penance on the penitent's side, namely, *contrition* of the heart, *confession* of the mouth, and *satisfaction* in good works, such as fasting, alms-deeds and prayer; for as there are three ways of offending God and committing sin, first, by *thoughts*; secondly, by *words*; and, thirdly, by *deeds and actions*, it is both expedient and just that God should be appeased, and that the sins committed against his Divine Majesty should be cancelled by three other means; first, by *contrition*, which chiefly consists in thoughts, and resides in the heart; secondly, by *confession*, which is made by word of mouth; and, thirdly, by *satisfaction*, which consists in penitential works and deeds. As to sacramental confession, on which I have already touched, there is no state, no character,

no dignity or pre-eminence, that exempts the faithful from this duty. We are all sinners, and in consequence of our sins we are all subject to the same law; the priest as well as the layman, the prince as well as the slave. We do not find in all history, an instance of any dispensation ever having been granted in this law, or even having been applied for by the greatest Sovereigns or Emperors of the earth, which is a further proof that confession is not a human invention, but has been looked upon in all nations, and in all ages, since the days of the Apostles, as a divine institution and precept, wherein the Church has no power to dispense. The writings of the primitive fathers plainly shew, that it is as ancient as Christianity itself; nay, even in the Law of Moses, which prefigured the new Law of Christ, a special confession of sins was expressly prescribed, as we read in the Book of Numbers, ch. v. although it was not then sacramental. We read also in Leviticus, c. xiii. that those who were infected with the leprosy, which was a figure of sin, were obliged to shew themselves to the priests, and to submit to their judgment, which, according to the remark of the ancient fathers, was an emblem of the confession of sins in the Sacrament of Penance. For this reason our Blessed Saviour commanded the ten lepers, who came to him to be cured of their leprosy, Luke, c. xvii. to go first and shew themselves to the priests, giving us thereby to understand that sinners, who are lepers in a mystical sense, must first approach the priests, and lay open the true state of their conscience before their souls can be cleansed and purified from the dangerous leprosy of mortal sin. Hence St. John says, 1 Epistle, c. i. v. 9. *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all iniquity.* St. James also, in his Epistle, c. v. v. 16. says, *Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be saved.* St. Matthew, c. iii. and St. Mark, c. i. informs us, that shoals of proselytes flocked from different parts of Judea to St. John the Baptist, *doing penance and confessing their sins.* It is likewise related in Acts, c. xix. that the first Christians cast themselves at the feet of the Apostles, and confessed the sins they had committed. *Many that believed came and confessed their deeds,* that is, their sins, as St. John Chrysostom expounds it. St. Augustine, Lib. de Visit. Infirm. therefore concludes, and says, *If thou wilt have Heaven open to thee, open thy mouth in confession to the priest.* St. Cyprian also exhorts all sinners to a timely repentance, and to make an *humble confession of their sins whilst their confession can be admitted, and their satisfaction and the pardon given them by the priests are available with God;* adding, moreover, *that a delusive absolution, given at random, is dangerous to the givers and useless to the receivers.* St. Ambrose, who made the administration of the Sacrament of Penance a chief part of his pastoral care, wrote two books on this subject, wherein he explains all the parts

and duties of penance; and speaking particularly of the obligation of confessing sins, he says, Lib. 2. c. 6. *If thou wilt be justified, confess thy crime; for an humble confession loosens the bonds of sin.* It is recorded of this holy doctor, that whenever any persons confessed their sins to him, he shed such an abundance of tears as to make the penitents also weep and give marks of their inward contrition, without which neither absolution nor confession can have any effect.

The word *Contrition* comes from a Latin word that signifies to bruise or break a thing to pieces, and it is metaphorically applied to the heart of a true penitent, because it ought to be, as it were, bruised and broken asunder with grief and affliction for having sinned against the Lord. Contrition is generally defined an *inward sorrow of the heart for having offended so good a God, with an hatred and detestation of sin, and a firm resolution to sin no more.* There are two sorts of contrition, perfect and imperfect. Though we are to aim at perfect contrition, yet it is not essentially necessary with the sacramental absolution; it is a singular grace of God, which few attain to. Such was the contrition of King David, of Mary Magdalen, of St. Peter, and some other Scripture penitents. The Roman Catechism says, *that it is very rare and difficult to find the like contrition, now-a-days, amidst the many vicissitudes of this life, and incentives of vice that daily occur,* Part 2. c. 5. The necessary qualities and condition of that contrition which is to accompany confession, are these four: First, it must be *inferior*, or conceived and formed in the heart, which must hate and detest sin because it offends God. Second, it must be *supernatural*, and proceed from the grace of God, moving the penitent's soul by some motives of religion. Third, it must be *sovereign*, that is, above every other sorrow of the heart, as sin is above or greater than any other evil. Fourth, it must be *universal* or general, and extend itself to every mortal sin; without exception, that the penitent is guilty of, since he cannot be truly sorry for one, and hate it as being injurious and offensive to God, without being sorry for the other, and hating it for the same reason. It is not sufficient to be sorry for sin; because it exposes the sinner to some worldly shame, scandal and disgrace, or because it has brought on him temporal misfortunes, losses, and disorders. Such a sorrow is merely natural, and no way relative to God, like the sorrow of a malefactor, who by his misdemeanors has brought himself to a shameful and untimely end. A person who never heard a word of the Christian religion may repent upon the same motive; nay, the damned souls in hell repent and are very sorry for their past sins on this account. A true Gospel penitent must have a penitential abhorrence and detestation of sin, because it is displeasing to God's infinite goodness. He must love God as the fountain of justice, and detest sin for his sake, because it is offensive to his divine majesty; for, as St. Augus-

tine says, Serm. 7. de Temp. *Nothing renders a repentance certain but a love of God and a hatred of sin.* From contrition there springs a *firm purpose of amendment*; for, as a learned writer observes, contrition has two faces; with the one it looks back at the sins already committed, and laments them with an aching heart; with the other it looks forward, and regards the time to come with a sincere resolution and fixed determination of the will to sin no more, and of course to shun all the dangerous and immediate occasions that dispose unto mortal sin, either of their own nature, or by reason of a peculiar weakness of temper that is easily wrought upon. Hence St. Augustine says, *If thou art penitent, be sorry for what thou hast done; if thou art sorry for it, do it no more, because, if thou continuest to do it, thou art no penitent.* A sincere penitent considers himself to be much in the same condition of a person newly recovered out of a very heavy fit of sickness, who is therefore obliged to continue a regular diet and exercise for fear of a relapse; he regards his own infirm will like a torch that is newly blown out, and that may easily take fire and flame again with every blast of wind. This determines him to fly from whatever he foresees will be the cause of his spiritual ruin, with the same apprehension and care that a child dreads the fire that once burned him, and that a prudent mariner shuns the rocks, shelves, and quicksands on which he was once shipwrecked.

Satisfaction, in fine, which is the third part of the Sacrament of Penance, springs also from the very substance and nature of contrition. By it is meant the faithful performance of the penitential works which are enjoined by the priest in the sacred tribunal, in order to repair the effects of sin, to prevent its return, to satisfy the divine justice, and atone for the temporal punishment due to sin, even after it is remitted both as to the guilt and eternal punishment. The actual performance of these good works belongs only to the integrity of the Sacrament of Penance, and is necessary to render it complete; but the intention, will or desire of performing them, is essentially included in a true repentance, which, like unto a good tree, is known by the fruits it produces.

O Father of mercies and God of all consolation, grant us the gift of such a repentance, that we may reap the benefit of thy divine institution, and partake of the manifold graces which thou hast annexed to it. O may we never be so ungrateful to thee, or so blind to our own spiritual welfare, as to slight and neglect this powerful means of salvation, or continue wallowing in the mire of iniquity, when we have so favourable an opportunity to effect the great work of our reconciliation with thee. We throw ourselves this day at the feet of thy mercy, like the penitent Magdalen, and most humbly beseech thee to pardon our past irregularities, and preserve us from future relapses, that persevering unto the end of our life in

thy love and service, we may have the happiness to see and enjoy thee hereafter in the kingdom of Heaven for a never-ending eternity. Which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On the Dangers and Difficulties of a Delayed Conversion.

Ego sum Pastor bonus.—Jo. c. x. v. 11.

I am the good shepherd.—St. John. c. x. v. 11.

THE Redeemer of the world-makes use of the most endearing expressions to mollify the stony hearts of sinners, and to reclaim them from their evil ways. One time he compares himself to an affectionate father embracing the prodigal child with open arms; another time to a tender-hearted mother; (another time to a hen gathering her chickens together and cherishing them under her wings.) In the Gospel of this day he compares himself to a good shepherd that gives his life for his flock, and he lays before us the properties of a good shepherd, to convince us that he is as solicitous (to procure our salvation) and to preserve us from destruction, as the most vigilant shepherd is to protect his flock from the incursions of the wolves. Nothing can be more consoling, (nothing more engaging) than this affectionate language, which the Lord our God has been pleased to make use of in Holy Writ, in order to invite sinners to repentance. Though he is all-sufficient in himself, and finds the completest happiness in the contemplation of his own excellency and infinite perfections, yet he expresses for us the same concern as if his felicity was connected with, and dependent on our services. The dignity of Sovereign Lord and Master disappears, to make room for the tender solicitude of a loving father and a good pastor; his only care seems to be the securing of our eternal welfare, even to the prejudice of his own interest; but what is most astonishing, is the little regard that is generally paid to his merciful invitations. His threats and promises are treated alike. Sinners run on blindly in the broad road of everlasting perdition, and entangle themselves in a labyrinth of criminal disorders, without the least apprehension of that dreadful punishment

which is reserved for them in the next world, during the whole length of a never-ending eternity. The Almighty calls upon them to repent; he presses and solicits them to renounce their evil ways; he invites them to have recourse to the throne of mercy without delay, and yet, alas! as if they were determined to tire his patience and wear out his mercy, they are deaf to his calls, and procrastinate their repentance from day to day. They slight his sweet invitations to conversion, and refuse to forsake their sins upon a presumptuous confidence and reliance on his unbounded mercy. In short, they remit their conversion to old age, when the ardor of their youthful passions will be abated; and they flatter themselves with the notion, that they will have time enough to think of doing penance in their last sickness, or on their death-bed, when they are glutted with the alluring pleasures of sense, weary of walking in the paths of iniquity, and no longer able to commit sin. Hence arise their disorders and misfortunes. But to destroy these most pernicious illusions by two simple and natural propositions, I will endeavour to shew you that nothing is more dangerous than to defer repentance from day to day, and live in disgrace with God upon a project of repenting in the end; first, because it is the way to render the sinner's conversion always more difficult; and secondly, because it is the way to render it sometimes in a manner impossible. Behold the entire plan of the following discourse, and the subject of your favourable attention. Let us previously implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed mother of Jesus, &c. *Ave Maria*.

There is not, there cannot be a more dangerous illusion, than to persist wilfully in the unhappy state of sin, and put off your conversion from day to day, upon a project of repenting in the end of your life. First, because a sudden and unforeseen accident may prevent the very possibility of your repenting at that critical period, and cast your souls in the twinkling of an eye, into hell's unquenchable flames. Human nature, which, in other respects is so fond of itself, would appear almost incapable of a stupidity so unreasonable, and of an insensibility so deplorable, if sad experience did not prove that even in the very midst of Christianity there are many, too many to be found, who upon the confidence of a future conversion, continue whole years together in the dismal state of, perhaps, as many mortal sins in thought, word and deed, as they have hairs on their head, though it is an article of their faith, that if they have the misfortune to be surprized by a sudden and unprovided death, whilst they are under the guilt of one single mortal sin unrepented, it alone is sufficient to render them liable to eternal damnation, and to strike their names for ever out of the book of life. One would imagine that this consideration alone should deter a Christian from living one hour in a bad state, where Heaven and eternity are at stake,

and in manifest danger of being irreparably lost. We came into the world when it pleased the Almighty, and we must leave it when he thinks proper. We know not the day, nor the hour, nor the minute, for he has confined the knowledge of it to himself, every moment may be our last, and we have but a mere *perhaps*, that the ensuing instant may not be for us the beginning of our eternity. Is it not, then, my brethren, a monstrous presumption to promise ourselves that we will live to do penance in old age, as if we were masters of the time to come, and really acquainted with the secrets of futurity? Is it not an insupportable insolence, a glaring injustice, and the most barefaced ingratitude, thus to appoint and reserve the last, the least, and the worst part of our life for the service of our most bountiful Creator, after so many signal benefits received, and so many solemn promises of giving us the kingdom of Heaven as a recompence for our fidelity? Is it not, in fine, the very height of insensibility, and of cruelty to our own souls, thus to expose them to the imminent danger of losing God and his glory, and of being condemned to burn in flames of fire with merciless devils for all eternity? Alas! how many thousands of unhappy souls are now burning in hell, who in their lifetime had as little notion of damning themselves and dying in their sins, as any sinner in this congregation has? They presumptuously delayed their conversion from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, as I fear some of you unfortunately do, until at length by a just judgment of God, they were suddenly cut off the face of the earth when they least expected it, and hurried away to the bar of Divine Justice without having time to make a single act of contrition, or implore forgiveness of their sins. How many terrifying examples do we read in Holy Writ, and in Church History, of such sinners, who in an instant were thus snatched away in the very bloom of life, by lightning, earthquakes, paralytic strokes, apoplexies, suffocations, or the like unexpected accidents; whilst they relied on the appearance of a flourishing constitution, and flattered themselves with a long series of prosperous years. Whilst they were pursuing their worldly projects, and forming to themselves imaginary schemes of a future repentance, death having suddenly overtaken them in their full career, blasted all their presumptuous expectations, and in just punishment of their final impenitence, they were sentenced to that bottomless pit of endless woe, where, as the Scripture says, *their worm will never die, and their fire will never be extinguished*. Thus it is, that the Lord threatens to serve those who shut their ears to his sweet calls, slight his graces, abuse his mercy, and provoke his justice by putting off their conversion. *They are surprized in the evil day*, says Ecclesiasticus, and caught unawares like unto a fish that is caught with the fisherman's hook, and swallows the bait instead of nourishment, at the very time that it is basking in the water; or like unto a bird which

is suddenly entangled in the fowler's net, the very moment that it is singing and diverting itself and others with its melodious notes, without the least apprehension of danger. Hence the wise man exhorts all sinners in the following words: *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day, for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he shall destroy thee*, Eccles. c. v. v. 8. Unless, therefore, my brethren, the loss of your God, the loss of his heavenly kingdom and the eternal ruin of your immortal souls, be objects below your concern, you will conclude with me that nothing is more dangerous than to put off your conversion, and of course you will seek the Lord your God by a speedy and sincere repentance, whenever you unhappily lose him and his sanctifying grace by any mortal sin. It is a most dreadful thing to be an enemy of God, though it were only for one day, or a single night; for which reason you should never suffer any considerable time to intervene between your fall and your rise, lest, perhaps, when you close your eyes to sleep you may never uncloseth them again, or awake and return to your senses but to view the infernal regions of the damned, and to feel unspeakable torments. What has happened to thousands of sinners may equally happen to you, and it is both your interest and duty to grow wise at their expense, rather than by your own woful experience. If you have your eternal salvation at heart you will follow the counsel of the Holy Ghost, who advises you to be *mindful of your Creator in the days of your youth*, and to *fly immediately from sin as from the face of a venomous serpent*; you will not neglect the means of salvation in time of health, or persevere in sin upon a project of repenting in old age, when the heat of your youthful passions is over. To defer your conversion to old age is the way to render it always more difficult and to multiply obstacles; for such is the fatal prerogative of sin, as St. Gregory remarks, that when it is not washed off by a speedy repentance, one sin naturally procreates and draws on another, which makes the sinner's case grow worse and worse every day, and removes him at a greater distance from God and from the way of salvation, insomuch that he that is not fit to repent to-day will be less fit to-morrow. Every new sin adds a new link to the chain that holds him in bondage, and affords the devil a fresh opportunity to fortify himself more strongly in his soul. By a continuance in sin he gradually contracts an evil habit, which takes deeper root every day, until at length, in process of time, it grows into second nature, and like old diseases it becomes almost incurable. This made holy Job say, *that the very bones of an old inveterate sinner shall be replenished with the crimes of his youth, and that they shall sleep with him in the grave*. This made St. Augustine compare such sinners to so many Lazaruses, who are not to be raised to the life of grace without great difficulties and many tears.

What folly, is it then, my brethren, to defer your conversion to old age, when so many obstacles and impediments will be multiplied, and so many criminal habits and engagements will be contracted, that even though you should have a sincere desire of repenting then, they will be capable of deterring you from undertaking so arduous an enterprize? If at present, in your perfect health, it seems difficult to do penance, to fast, to pray, to mortify yourselves, and practice those good works which the Church enjoins repenting sinners, how will you do it in old age, when the body requires to be cherished rather than chastised? If you find it unpleasant after three or four years disobedience to the laws of God and his Church, to resist your passions, and root out from your hearts the love of those favourite sins and darling vices which have defiled your souls, what will it be when twenty years more are added to the account? How will you be able to discharge the weighty obligations which the guilt of so many years requires? Who can assure you that the time to come will be as favourable for your conversion as the present time? Many sinners have attained to old age, and died then like stupid logs, or dumb and senseless beasts, according to the expression of St. Gregory; for as they forgot God in their life-time so by a just judgment they are suffered to forget themselves at the hour of death, and to die as they lived, without any serious thought of doing penance and making a provision for a happy eternity. Being daunted at the sight of so many obstacles and difficulties which they have to surmount, they are sometimes tempted to give themselves up to despair, and like unhappy Cain, to think their crimes too grievous to be ever forgiven. Moreover, it frequently happens that they are then deprived of the use of their reason by a malignant fever, or some other violent distemper. Under these circumstances repentance is rendered in a manner impossible; they are not in a condition to partake of the favourable supports of religion, and of course the holy Sacraments of Reconciliation which are so beneficial to others, become useless and unprofitable to them. Thus it is that the justice of God often punishes, by a subtraction of his gracious favours, those who in their health abuse his mercy as an encouragement to sin, and reserve for him only the ruins and dregs of old age, after spending the flower of their life and the best of their days in the pursuit of vice and in the service of the devil. But let us suppose that they retain the use of their reason, and cry out in their perfect senses for the assistance of a Clergyman in their last illness, I still contend for it that a late repentance, or death-bed conversion, is so dangerous, so deceitful, so uncertain, and attended with so many difficulties, that nothing but a groundless and insupportable presumption can induce sinners to flatter themselves with the notion of it. Their very situation renders them incapable of making any regular preparation, or disposing their souls for receiving the last sacraments

worthily; for how is it possible that a poor unfortunate sinner, who for a long series of years has been a stranger to every Christian virtue, and a slave to every fashionable vice, and who has deferred his repentance to the last hour, should be able to accomplish so great a work properly, when he is struggling between life and death? How will he be able to examine his conscience, and to recount the crimes of a life entirely spent in the neglect of every duty, and in a total oblivion of God and of his salvation? Penance according to the holy Fathers, is a *laborious baptism*, that requires great violence and rude mortifications; it is a bread of sorrow and tears, with which a true penitent must be nourished; and, as the Council of Trent observes, God's grace forfeited after baptism, is not to be recovered without great labours and many penitential tears; it usually costs those who are in perfect health much time and labour to work themselves into the necessary dispositions of a Gospel penitent, and to disengage their hearts from sinful affections of a long growth. We may judge, then, how unequal a sinner must be for so arduous a task, when he is seized all over with a mortal anguish, and besieged on all sides with the pangs and agonies of an approaching dissolution. When he comes to that extremity, he is not, commonly, so sensible of his guilt, nor so efficaciously touched with the remorse of a sincere sorrow for his past crimes, as he is distracted with the terrors of death, and the dark visionary apprehensions of the awful judgment which is immediately to ensue. The pains and agonies both of mind and body together with the heaviness and stupidity caused by his sickness, are enough to disqualify him, in a great measure from applying seriously to the important affair of his soul's eternal salvation; his thoughts will, at that time, run to the place where the force of his pain and the violence of his disorder lies. Many other obstacles and impediments will occur then, such as the sight of a disconsolate wife, of weeping children and friends, the flattery of the world, the hopes of recovery with which he is deceived, the desire of life, and the temptations of the devil, who at that critical period, is most active to procure his eternal perdition. May I not, then justly say, that no time is more unfit or more improper for sinners to begin their conversion? In that extremity, generally speaking, they only part with their sins as sailors in the midst of a violent tempest part with the cargo of a ship, to fish it up again when the storm is over. Every thing is done in a hurry, and with precipitation. The rites of the Church are hastily administered by the attending Clergyman, because they were deferred to the last extremity, and the case is pressing and will admit of no further delay. In fine, some outward signs of repentance are, perhaps, given by the dying sinner, and thus he launches into eternity, to appear before the tremendous Tribunal of his Sovereign Judge. But all these exterior performances and appearances, however favourable they may seem in the eyes of the world, will avail him no more in the sight of

the all-seeing God, unless they be accompanied with the interior sorrow and conversion of the heart, than the like outward appearances of repentance formerly availed the unfortunate King Antiochus, who as we read in 2 Book of Machabees, obtained no mercy, but died in his sins, and was eternally lost, because his heart was not truly changed and converted, though he implored forgiveness with sighs and tears in his last extremity.

However, the greatest profligate on earth should never despair, but should employ his last moments in preparing for a happy death. If he be so unfortunate as to have his repentance to begin at the end of his life, he ought to do all that is then in his power, and endeavour to bewail his past sins in the bitterness of his soul, with an entire confidence in the merits of his blessed Redeemer and the unbounded mercies of God, who never rejects a contrite and humbled heart. But as no one is to despair, so no one is to presume, or to defer his repentance and continue in sin to the end of his life, because God is gracious and merciful; for as St. Gregory says, *he who has promised mercy and pardon to those that truly repent, has never promised the grace of a true repentance to those who defer it.* On the contrary, the Divine Mercy, when slighted, abused and despised, turns, at length, into indignation, and defeats the wicked policy and insolence of those presumptuous sinners who reject its gracious offers, and think only of leaving sin when sin leaves them. Hearken to what the Lord says, Proverbs, c. i. v. 24. *Because I have called upon you, and you refused to hear; I have stretched out my hand, and you would not regard me; you have despised all my counsels and neglected my reprehensions; wherefore, when you shall call upon me in your turn, I will not hear; I will also be deaf to your cries, and laugh at your destruction;* and again in St. John, c. vii. *You shall seek me and shall not find me, and you shall die in your sins.*

After such a dreadful sentence, will you say, my brethren, that it is never too late to repent? Will you continue to offend God as long as you are able, and resolve only to make your peace with him when you are tired of the world, and no longer able to gratify your passions? Do not those sinners justly deserve to be abandoned by God at the hour of death, who abandoned him in their life-time, and only intend to return to him when their souls are defiled all over with sin, and their bodies worn out with drunkenness, intemperance and debauchery? Do they not deserve to be disappointed who expect to go to Heaven by walking on boldly in the direct road that leads to hell and everlasting perdition? Is it to be supposed that a sinful life, thus wilfully continued, will terminate in a happy death? No, says the great Augustine, *for men generally die as they live; and he seldom dies well who lived ill;* and again, in his Exposition of Psalm liv. *the penance that is done by a sick man is sick; and that which is done by a dying man, I fear,*

is also dead; for though a true repentance never comes too late, yet a late repentance, or a death-bed conversion, is seldom or ever true and sincere. In the whole Scripture we have but one instance in favour of a late repentance, namely, that of the good thief on the cross, an example so singular in all its circumstances, that it should by no means encourage sinners to trust to a late repentance, or venture their eternal salvation upon so desperate an issue as a death-bed conversion, especially, since to counterbalance this extraordinary instance of God's mercy, they have a most terrifying instance of Divine Justice in the other thief, who at the same time was suffered to die in his sins, and to descend from the temporal punishment of the cross, and from the very side of Jesus Christ, into the eternal torments of hell. May God of his infinite mercy preserve every one here from the like misfortune; and it is with this view I come this day to apprize you, in the name of the living God, that the only time you can depend on for accomplishing the great work of your reconciliation, is the present time, when you are in health, and capable of applying the proper means, and whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines, and the arms of your crucified Redeemer are open to embrace those who return to him in the sincerity of their hearts.

If, therefore, there should happen to be any sinners in this congregation whose consciences fly in their faces, and tell them that they have been straying away these several years past from the narrow path of salvation, and turning their backs upon God and his Church, neglecting the holy sacraments, and involving themselves deeper and deeper in the mire of iniquity, and in the criminal habits of cursing, swearing, blaspheming, drunkenness, injustice, debauchery, or the like detestable vices, O let me entreat them to sleep no longer unconcerned on the brink of hell and in the arms of perdition, but to repent in time, that they may not have reason hereafter to repent in vain for all eternity in the flames of hell. Let me beseech them, without any further loss of time, to shake off the galling yoke of the devil, and to banish from the temple of their souls those favourite vices and foul monsters of sin which they have hitherto cherished in their breasts, to the great contempt and injury of the Lord their God. Let me remind them, that the more time they lose, and the longer they put off their conversion, the worse their case will grow every day, the greater difficulties will arise, the more their evil habits will be strengthened, the more unworthy they will render themselves of the gracious favours of Heaven, and the greater risk they will run of having the gate of mercy eternally shut in their face. Let me, in fine, exhort them with apostolic words, to *hasten with confidence to the throne of divine grace*, to throw themselves with humility at the feet of God's mercy without further delay, to acknowledge their past ingratitude with sorrow, and to implore forgiveness with a firm purpose of sinning no more. Grant us all this grace,

O Father of mercies and giver of all good gifts. Thou hast declared, that thou *desirest not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live*. Convert us then, O Lord, and we shall be converted. Prostrate at thy feet, we resolve from this moment to arise from the profound lethargy of sin. Vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to assist us herein. Deliver us from the tyranny of our passions, and break asunder the chains of our evil habits, which have enslaved us so long. Mollify our hardened hearts, and melt them into tears of compunction, that our souls being purified in the waters of penance from the foul stains of sin, we may be admitted one day into the eternal mansions of bliss, which thou, O loving Jesus, hast purchased for us by the effusion of thy precious blood, and which, my dear brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On the Habit of Sin.

Qui facit Peccatum Servus est Peccati.—*Jo. c. viii. v. 34.*

He who committeth Sin is a Slave to Sin.—*St. John, c. viii. v. 34.*

TO be a slave to sin is a dreadful servitude, a deplorable bondage and captivity. It is to be a slave to a cruel tyrant and to the most dangerous enemy of our salvation, an enemy that is intent on nothing less than our utter ruin, and the loss of our souls. It is to be a slave to an enemy that robs us of God, and his grace; that divests us of all right to Heaven, and exposes us to the evident danger of perishing for all eternity. Such is the formidable enemy that sinners are enslaved by, especially when they have contracted a habit of sin by frequently relapsing into it. Of such unfortunate sinners we may affirm, in the language of the Scripture, that they are *tied with the cords of sin*, bound with the fetters of iniquity, and pass their days in a miserable bondage. Vice gains an absolute ascendant and dominion over them; it becomes through custom a second nature, and reduces them to a kind of necessity of servilely obeying all its commands, and submitting to its tyrannical laws.

How many sad examples do we daily see of this fatal necessity in drunkards, cursers, swearers, blasphemers, fetchers, and other habitual sinners, who miserably groan whole years together under the chains of their favourite vices? They are

frequently galled with the dreadful weight, and even resolve to shake off the burden, but they have not courage or strength even when they seem to have a mind. They fail in the attempt, and scarce advance one step towards a reformation of life when they are overpowered by a vicious habit, and relapse into the same heinous crimes. To make you thoroughly sensible, my brethren, of the dangerous state and deplorable servitude of such relapsing and habitual sinners; to caution you against the fatal consequences and misfortunes that are incurred by a long habit of relapsing, and to prescribe suitable remedies against such dreadful evils, is the design of the following discourse. The dangers and difficulties that a habit of sin involves a relapsing sinner in, shall be the subject of my first point. The means to overcome these difficulties shall be the subject of the second. Let us previously implore the divine assistance, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

Although mankind has a strong propensity to evil, yet few plunge themselves headlong into the gulph of vice at once, or become completely wicked on a sudden; for, as virtue has its degrees, by which men ascend gradually to the height of perfection, vice, in like manner, has certain degrees, by which they descend into the abyss of iniquity. One crime not speedily washed off by a sincere repentance, as St. Gregory observes, naturally leads the sinner on to another, till a vicious habit is gradually formed by sinful acts several times repeated. When a habit of sin is thus contracted, it begets a kind of second nature, which, as St. Augustine says, in Ps. xxx. is only to be overcome by painful and tedious conflicts; for every one knows how deeply our natural inclinations are rooted in the soul, how strongly the weight of concupiscence influences the heart of a sinner and bends it to vice, and what a wonderful force it gives to every habit that seconds the vicious inclinations of nature. To surmount a habit of this sort is a work of time, that requires much labour and hardship. It is, indeed, easy to dislodge sin and to stop its progress in the beginning, when first it gains admittance into the soul, as it is easy to bend a tender twig, or to pull up a young tree lately planted; but as a strong grown tree, that has cast deep roots in the earth, is not to be cut down with one stroke of an axe, or to be removed without much labour and difficulty, so, in like manner, sin, that is strengthened by time, and becomes habitual by repeated relapses, is not to be rooted up and overthrown but by the most vigorous efforts.

It is difficult to cure a leg or an arm that has been often fractured, or to cleanse and sweeten a vessel that has been infected for a long time with some putrid matter. Judge, then, what pains and labour it must cost to heal and purify the soul of a sinner habituated in vice, and infected with a long train of sinful disorders. If relapses into bodily distempers be more

dangerous, more fatal, and harder to be cured than the former disorder, it is easy to conceive how frequent relapses into sin render the case of an habitual sinner continually worse and more desperate, according to these words of the Gospel, Luke c. xi. *The last state of such a man is worse than the first.* His wounds, by being neglected, gradually fester and mortify, and his spiritual maladies, by a long continuance, become at length almost incurable, and usually terminate in the eternal death of his soul.

What renders the state of relapsing sinners so dangerous, and their conversion so extremely difficult is, because the ordinary means whereby God recalls sinners to repentance become useless to them through their own negligence, obstinacy and perverseness; they either totally neglect the holy sacraments, or approach them without the necessary dispositions. The habit of sin gives them a distaste for exercises of piety and spiritual duties; it stifles all the remorse of conscience, renders them insensible to the most enormous crimes, and, as the Scripture phrase expresses it, it makes them *swallow down iniquity as water*, without reluctance. Every relapse removes them at a greater distance from God, and renders them more unworthy of his grace, as it implies a more barefaced contempt of his Divine Majesty, a greater abuse of his mercy, a blacker ingratitude, a baser treachery and perfidiousness. Every fresh crime they commit adds a new link to the chain that holds them in bondage, and consequently puts a fresh obstacle to their conversion. The devil, ever jealous of his prey, is in the interim continually gaining ground and acquiring an addition of power over them, until at length, by a long habit of relapsing, they establish his tyrannical dominion over them in such a manner, and strengthen their own fetters to that degree, that they will not have the courage or resolution to shake off his galling yoke without the help of an extraordinary grace, which they have no reason to expect. Hence the Gospel compares the relapsing and habitual sinner to a man, who, after having been dispossessed of one devil, opens his heart for him again, and becomes the dwelling-place of seven other devils more wicked than the former.

The force of a vicious habit appeared visibly in the great Augustine. O what struggles, what interior conflicts, what violent combat, what sighs and tears, did it not cost him before he was able to dissolve his criminal engagements, and extricate himself from that sad captivity to which he had been reduced by a habit of sin? Hear himself bewailing the disorders of his past life, Conf. l. 8. c. 5. Alas! says he, I was tied, but by whom? by my own will, which grew as hard as iron. The devil became absolute master of it, and led it as he pleased; he made of a criminal passion a heavy chain, with which he held me fast, and from which I could not disengage myself. O sad captivity! continues the holy penitent. O strange servitude! I com-

plained of it, and yet I loved it; I was willing to be released from it, and I was, notwithstanding, still desirous to remain in it; I made some efforts to abandon vice, but the efforts I made were like unto the feeble efforts of a man in a slumber, who is willing to get out of bed, and for this purpose now and then raises his head, but instantly falls back, overpowered by sleep and benumbed with drowsiness, even when he has a mind to arise, and when reason tells him it is high time. In this perplexity of mind, says the renowned penitent, my heart broke out into sighs, and my eyes were bathed with tears; I retired alone to weep, and then my tears flowed in abundance: I addressed myself to Heaven, and cried out, How long, O Lord, how long shall I be governed by a cruel passion, and when will that happy moment come in which I shall see myself delivered from it? To-morrow; to-morrow. Why not this day? Why not this hour? Why do I not put an end to my criminal excesses this very instant?—Such was the painful and tedious conflict of the great Augustine with a habit of sin! It is true, he triumphed over it at length; but how? By a miracle in the order of grace. His conversion was the effect of the all-powerful voice of God, which the very dead obey, and without which he never would have gained over himself so complete a victory. Hence the illustrious penitent, perceiving a happy and unexpected change in himself, and filled with sentiments of gratitude, joy and admiration, repeatedly cried out, *O God of mercy, my chains are broken, may thou be blessed for ever. O my God, let my heart burn incessantly with the love of thee, and let my tongue still utter thy praises, as a grateful acknowledgment for thy inexpressible favours.*

So true it is, my brethren, that the conversion of an habitual sinner is a most difficult task, that costs much labour and pains, and requires singular and extraordinary efforts. St. John Chrysostom did not hesitate to say, that it is a greater work than the raising of a dead man to life. Hence our Blessed Saviour, who disposed all things according to the views of his adorable wisdom, not only intended to give the Jews a proof of his divinity when he raised the dead to life, but also was willing that the visible miracles which he wrought in their favour should serve to represent the invisible miracle that is wrought by his divine grace, in the spiritual resurrection of a sinner from the death of mortal sin. The Gospel only makes mention of three persons whom he visibly raised from the dead, and these three, according to St. Augustine, were figures of three different classes of sinners. The first he raised was the daughter of a Prince or Ruler of the Jewish synagogue, Mat. c. ix. The second was the son of the widow of Naim, St. Luke, c. vii. The third was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, John, c. xi. When he raised the Prince's daughter, he no sooner took hold of her hand and said, *Girl, arise*, but she came immediately to life again. When he raised the widow's

son, he did something more; he stopped the multitude; he went over and touched the bier on which the corpse was carried; he spoke three or four words, and commanded the dead man to rise up in the presence of his mother and friends, who were escorting him to the grave; but when he raised Lazarus, he not only spoke, but raised his voice aloud, and cried out, *Lazarus come forth*; he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, he prayed, he wept, he sighed, he was troubled more than usual, and gave all the marks of an action that required a singular effort and an extraordinary power. It may appear somewhat strange that Christ our Lord should act so differently in raising these three dead persons to life; but St. Augustine unravels the mystery, by teaching us that the difference of their resurrection marks out to us the different operations of divine grace in the conversion of different sorts of sinners, whose spiritual resurrection was prefigured by their corporal resurrection, as their corporal death represented the deplorable effects of sin, and the dismal state of a sinner. The daughter of the prince of the synagogue had but just expired that instant. To raise her again to life cost our Saviour no great trouble or pains; no extraordinary miracle was necessary. The widow's son was farther gone; he was not only dead, but also laid upon a bier, and carried out in order to be buried. To restore him to life was a work of more absolute power, for which reason our Blessed Saviour made use of his authority, and commanded him to rise up; but Lazarus was already four days dead, interred and corrupted; his hands and feet were tied with bandages, his head was bound with a napkin, and his monument was covered with a stone of great magnitude. To bring him to life was a more difficult task. Nothing less than an extraordinary miracle was necessary; nothing less than a vigorous effort and exertion of the almighty power of the Son of God was required. The first of these three represents such souls as have but just fallen into sin. It is a more easy matter to restore them to the life of grace. The second represents such as are not only spiritually dead by sin, but are also laid, as it were, upon a bier, and carried away by their criminal passions towards the grave of a sinful habit; stronger graces are required for the raising of them. But Lazarus represents the dismal state of the relapsing and habitual sinner, whose conversion is attended with uncommon difficulties.

Lazarus was a figure of those inveterate sinners, those notorious cursers, swearers, lechers, &c. who lie dead and buried in the habit of mortal sin as in a grave, and that not for four days only, but perhaps four years, nay, ten, twenty or thirty years, communicating the contagion of their vices to others, and infecting them by their scandalous example. The bandages with which the hands and feet of Lazarus were tied, represent the chains and fetters of sin with which they are bound; the stone that covered his grave represents the weight of a long

sinful habit under which they labour, and which presses them down to the earth with such force, that St. Augustine cries out, *O how difficult is it for him to rise who is pressed down by the weight of an evil habit?* In fine, all the different circumstances wherein the Gospel represents Lazarus to have been before his resurrection, denote the dismal state and deplorable bondage of habitual sinners, and the difficulties that obstruct their spiritual resurrection; they are, as St. Augustine speaks, so many Lazaruses, not to be raised to the life of grace without many tears, and a prodigious miracle of the grace of Jesus Christ. It was for them that Christ was troubled at the sight of Lazarus's tomb; it was for them he then sighed and wept; for what was more deserving of the tears of the Son of God, says St. Augustine, than a soul created after the image of God, but become a slave of the devil by mortal sin? What subject more capable of drawing tears from the eyes of Jesus Christ, than to behold what he ransomed at the expence of his precious blood enveloped in criminal engagements and buried in the habit of sin, in the very centre of perdition?

The habitual sinner, reduced to this situation, falls by degrees into a kind of insensibility that paves the way to final impenitence. When he first fell into sin he blushed and was ashamed of his weakness; his conscience was alarmed at his misfortune; but when he has often relapsed into the same crime, and suffered a habit to be formed, he no longer feels any pain, trouble or inquietude. *Omne peccatum consuetudine vilescit*, says St. Augustine; he is in a profound tranquillity, though he is an enemy to God and a slave to the devil, liable every instant to become a victim to the scorching flames of hell. The fire of charity being extinguished in his soul, his heart grows as hard as a rock, says St. Gregory. It is hardened, says St. Augustine, like water which is changed into ice in the winter, when the sun withdraws its brilliant rays from it. The best advices have no more effect on him than drops of water have on a stone; they may, indeed, by falling frequently, make some little cavities or some superficial impression, but will not effect his conversion. A zealous preacher may, perhaps, strike out of the flinty heart of such a sinner, a sigh, a tear, a feeble desire of repentance; he may extort some fair promises of amendment; he may work him into some pious resolutions, but, alas! instead of executing them, he will fly back again at the first temptation, and gratify the vice to which he is a slave. He may, perhaps, sometimes say within himself, as Sampson did when he found himself in captivity among the Philistians, *I will disengage and extricate myself from this bondage; but if he attempts, he sinks like that unfortunate Prince of Israel, under the weight of his chains. He finds himself so entangled and involved in such a deplorable servitude, that he has neither courage, resolution or strength to break the fetters into which he has thrown himself by a constant custom of relapsing. I*

have now laid before you the dangerous state and the deplorable servitude of an habitual and relapsing sinner, in order to deter you against the like misfortune. You have heard what difficulties a vicious habit opposes to his conversion. Let us briefly consider the means to overcome these difficulties. This is the subject of the second point, which I shall reduce to a few words.

The force of infinite power is not less visible, says the Apostle, in the conversion of sinners, than in the resurrection of the dead; for it is the same wonderful power of God that restores the dead to life, and that raises the sinner from the death of sin to the life of grace. I find only this difference, that the all-powerful voice of God, which penetrates to the bottom of the deepest abyss, and which calls the dead from the grave, meets with no resistance in a dead body, into which it diffuses life and motion; whereas the sinner, whose soul is dead by sin, seems to retain some remains of his former strength and vigour only to resist and oppose this voice, which can call and raise him from the gulph of vice, and from that abyss of iniquity in which he lies plunged. Notwithstanding, how difficult soever the conversion of such a sinner may be, it is still possible, and he may yet become a vessel of election. He is, therefore, never to despair, like unhappy Judas or wicked Cain, but rather to confide, like the penitent Magdalen, and have immediate recourse to the means that are proper to effect the important work of his reconciliation with God. The first of these means is prayer; I mean humble, devout, and fervent prayer, accompanied with fasting and alms-deeds. If then, my brethren, any one amongst you has the misfortune to be enslaved by a vicious habit, ask earnestly of God to be delivered from so dreadful a bondage; ask in the name of Jesus, who has solemnly promised that whatsoever you ask the Father in his name shall be granted to you. Speak to him in the moving language in which Martha and Magdalen did when they petitioned for the health of their brother Lazarus, *Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick*; *Lord, he whom thou hast created and formed to thy own image*; *Lord, he whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood, and could I presume to say it, he whom thou still lovest is sick*; wilt thou suffer him to die and perish for all eternity? Wilt thou suffer that soul to be lost, which thou hast so dearly purchased? Make this prayer in the morning; make it in the evening; make it at the foot of the altar; make it in your own house. If the sisters of Lazarus had not prayed, Lazarus would not have been restored to life. The more you are immersed in criminal habits, the more you are to redouble the fervour of your prayer; the louder you are to cry to Heaven for mercy and pardon, in imitation of the Royal Prophet, who, Ps. cxxix. cried out from the deep abyss, *De profundis, &c. From the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord; O Lord hear my voice.* The second means to over-

come a habit of vice is retirement, solitude and meditation. Disengage yourselves for a few days from the embarrassments of worldly concerns, which hinder you to think of your salvation; withdraw for a while from the noise of the world; retire from the hurry of business, and reflect seriously on the misery and danger of your present unhappy state; reflect on the multitude and enormity of your crying sins; reflect on the patience of God, who has borne with you so long, and on his bounty, which makes him ready to receive you with open arms, provided you return to him in the sincerity of your hearts. If you allow yourselves a little time of cool reflection on these great truths, you will be convinced that Heaven should be purchased let what will be the price, and sin should be dreaded more than death itself. These reflections, deeply imprinted in your minds, will rouse you from the profound lethargy of sin, will make you triumph over vice, and have recourse to the holy Sacraments of Reconciliation with a sincere repentance, which is the only balsam that can rescue you from the jaws of hell, and fit you for Heaven, by being duly applied to the deep and mortal wounds which sin has inflicted on your souls.

The third and last means to overcome a habit of vice is to shun the occasions of sin, according to that rule prescribed in the Gospel, St. Matt. c. xviii. v. 8. *If thy hand or thy foot scandalizes thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; and if thy eye scandalizes thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee;* that is you must renounce what is most dear to you in the world, sooner than remain in the occasion of offending God and losing your soul. In vain do you flatter yourselves that you will subdue your inordinate passions, and triumph over your vicious habits, without taking these necessary precautions. In vain do you expect that your heart will be truly changed, while you live in the midst of those dangers and those engagements, which have a thousand times baffled your very best resolutions. In vain do you think that you will be chaste and sober; whilst you frequent those places where intemperance is indulged, and whilst you will not be prevailed on to shun those familiarities, those private visits, those pestilential houses, those amorous novels and lascivious companions, that have so often debauched and corrupted your morals. Notwithstanding, we frequently meet sinners, who tired of their criminal disorders, and wearied in the ways of iniquity, would be willing to reform their lives and return to God, but still are not determined to withdraw from those objects and those snares which have so often proved fatal to their innocence. They indeed make some advances, some feeble efforts towards a conversion; they address themselves to a spiritual director, and do not hesitate to make many fair promises and good resolutions; they are engaged to consent to a salutary delay of the sacramental absolution, that they may in the interim, give some satisfactory proof of the sincerity of their repentance, and take some measures that seem expedient to

effect a true change of life. The time and the day on which they are to return to the Sacred Tribunal is marked out. This time, this day being come, instead of returning to give an account of their perseverance, they are seen no more ; some unlucky adventure comes across them, and throws them again into the occasion of sin, or perhaps they seek it of their own accord. This is sufficient to deter them from approaching the fountains of grace ; they complain without reason, of the just severity with which they are treated, in being refused the absolution until they are qualified to receive it with advantage to their souls. They pass their days in vainly detesting their chains, without being delivered from their bondage. Penitents in appearance but always sinners in reality, because they are unwilling to retrench the dangerous occasions of sin. In effect, my brethren, your evil habits are not to be conquered, your passions are not to be weakened but by separating from those objects that first inflamed them. Begin, then, the work of your salvation, by separating from those occasions. Remove the obstacles which hinder the grace of God from entering into your souls. The enterprize, I own, seems disagreeable and painful to flesh and blood, but it is an enterprize you must compass, or eternal damnation will be the consequence of your indolence and neglect. Resolve, then, my brethren, from this present time to surmount every difficulty that stands in your way and opposes your conversion. Let your case be ever so desperate you are not to despond ; you have still a remedy left. There is no sin unpardonable, no wound incurable, to the hand of an all powerful Physician, says St. Augustine. There is no habit, be it ever so inveterate, ever so obstinate, stubborn or perverse, but you may absolutely depose and overcome with the help of God, if you labour in good earnest and faithfully co-operate with his divine grace, which is able to change the most corrupt heart in an instant. Jesus Christ, who raised Lazarus from the dead, is both willing and able to work a similar miracle in your favour, provided you have recourse to him in the sincerity of your hearts. If there be any Lazaruses in this congregation, if there be any old habitual sinners here, involved in the dismal state and servitude of mortal sin, O let me entreat them to sleep no longer in the arms of perdition, but to arise from their lethargy without delay, and throw themselves at the feet of God's mercy with a contrite and humbled heart, which he never will reject. O good and merciful Lord, look down upon us with an eye of pity, and as thou didst heretofore deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so vouchsafe to deliver us all from the bondage of sin. Break the chains of iniquity with which we are bound, and restore us to the sweet liberty of thy children, that we may sacrifice to thee an host of thanksgiving, and proclaim thy immortal praises for all eternity in the society of

thy Angels and Saints in the kingdom of Heaven. Which I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On Shunning the Dangerous Occasions of Sin.

Qui amat Periculum peribit in illo.—Eccles. c. iii. v. 27.

He that loves danger shall perish in it.—Eccles. c. iii. v. 27.

THE life of a Christian ought to be the proof of his religion, and a public declaration of the sanctity of his profession; for what is a christian but a disciple of Jesus Christ, enlightened with the light of his faith, educated in the great truths of his religion, formed upon the bright principles of his Gospel, and openly professing to follow Jesus Christ himself as his leader and pattern? To follow Christ is to frame our lives by the model of his life, to resemble him as far as human frailty will permit, to observe the precepts and rules of the Gospel, to declare war against the pomps and vanities of the world, to abhor and detest sin, to renounce all alliance with the devil and all truce with our inordinate passions and vicious inclinations. These are the duties to which we obliged ourselves at the baptismal font; this is what we vowed when we entered into the Church of Christ, and upon this condition only we were received into the number of the faithful. You will say, perhaps, this punctuality, this exact observance of the maxims of the Gospel, is scarce compatible with the different states and professions of men, who live in a world where they are constantly exposed to so many dangers and temptations. If anchorets in the desert, and recluses in their beloved retreats, find a difficulty in preserving themselves from the contagion of vice, how can we in the midst of worldly engagements, with a frail nature and a strong propensity to evil, be firm and constant in the practice of virtue? I agree with you, my brethren, it is no easy matter; nature is frail, and the danger is every where present. However, exposed to danger, and frail as you are, you have still a specific remedy and an efficacious means to save yourselves from the danger; this remedy is to shun the occasions of sin. If you are just, be always on your guard, lest you diminish your strength by seeking the occasion and loving the danger; if you are sinners, be likewise on your guard, lest you augment your weakness by engaging yourselves in the occasion, and throwing yourselves in the way

of temptation. If you are in the state of grace, and seek the dangerous occasion of sin, it will make you fall. This I will shew you in my first point. If you are in the state of sin the occasion will hinder you from rising out of it. This shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favourable attention. Let us previously invoke the Divine aid, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin Mary, saluting her with the Angel, and saying *Ave Maria*.

We are to distinguish two different sorts of dangerous occasions that lead and incite a person to sin. Some occasions are evidently dangerous of their own nature, and with regard to all men in general, such as bad company, associating with professed libertines, forming connections with people of depraved morals and bad principles, frequenting seminaries of vice and houses of ill fame, reading bad books, viewing immodest pictures, hearkening to obscene songs and lewd discourses; the natural tendency and immediate effect of such dangerous occasions being to inflame the passions and to draw people into mortal sin. There is another kind of occasion, which of its own intrinsic nature is not bad or apt to lead men in general into sin, but is respectively dangerous, that is to say, in regard of and with respect to a particular individual, on account of his peculiar disposition and frailty; for example, a certain house, a certain company, a certain occupation and employment, which accidentally becomes the immediate and dangerous occasion of mortal sin to a man, who knows by experience that he is so weak as to be thereby led often astray, and to make a shipwreck of his virtue, though other men in general resort the same place, frequent the same company, and follow the same occupation, without being exposed to the like danger. There are, in fine, other occasions, which are only remote and distant occasions of sin, or which, though they may possibly occasion a person to fall, yet seldom or rarely do it. Were we under an obligation of shunning all occasions of this description, we should be under the necessity of quitting the world entirely, as the Apostle remarks, since there is scarcely any thing but what may happen one time or other, to prove the remote and distant occasion of sin.

As to the immediate occasions, which of their own nature have a dangerous tendency in general, or which, by reason of a person's own peculiar weakness are respectively dangerous, and apt to draw him frequently into sin, they must be indispensably shunned and relinquished. No temporal profit or loss can render it lawful to continue wilfully in such occasions, when a person has it in his power to avoid and quit them; for the same divine precept that forbids sin, forbids us also to remain in the immediate danger of sinning, and obliges us to separate ourselves effectually from whatever is morally inseparable from sin, though it should happen to be as dear to us as the very apple of our eye. This is manifest from the doctrine of our

Blessed Saviour, St. Matthew, c. xviii. v. 8. where he charges us to cut off the hand and the foot, and to pluck out the eye that scandalizes us; that is to say, to break off from all the dangerous occasions of sin, how dear soever they may be to us; to remove those favourite objects which are fatal to virtue and innocence; to abandon those darling companions who lead us into criminal practices; to renounce those dangerous freedoms and liberties which pave the way to the spiritual ruin of so many souls; to forsake those places where the enticing nets of sensual pleasures are spread on every side for the destruction of giddy and thoughtless youth, and to shun those houses where the passions are roused, where drunkenness prevails, and where debauchery is counted an accomplishment. These are so many hands and feet that must be cut off; these are so many eyes, as it were, that must be plucked out and cast away, when they are a constant source of scandal to us, that is, when they frequently prove the occasion of sin to us; for, in the Scripture language, every thing is scandal that violently inclines and leads us into sin. Fatal experience teaches us how great our own weakness is, and that he who loves and seeks the danger may justly expect to perish therein. In spite of our strongest resolutions and purposes, if we expose ourselves to the occasion, the occasion will overthrow us and make us fall, since the occasion always presents the same alluring objects, and the same objects seldom fail of making the same impressions on the heart, and the same impressions usually bring on the same fatal consequences, as man carries about him the same fund of natural weakness and misery. He is a combustible matter, says St. Chrysostom, and should therefore fear to throw himself into the midst of burning coals. Even the most just man, and the most attached to the service of God, who of his own accord runs with temerity into the occasion, cannot promise himself that he will escape the danger without falling into sin, and that for two reasons; first, because nothing provokes God more to withdraw his graces from him; secondly, because nothing gives the enemy of his soul a greater power over him. In the first place, I say, nothing provokes God more to withdraw his graces; I mean those powerful, those efficacious, those victorious graces with which we easily overcome all the efforts of hell, and without which we can never resist the temptation; graces, which are oftener bestowed on the just; who know how to have a due esteem for them, than on sinners, who despise, undervalue and regard them not; but graces, which both the just and sinners renders themselves unworthy of when they boldly look temptation in the face, and rashly throw themselves into the dangerous occasion of sin; for the Almighty, who is sovereignly righteous and infinitely wise, does not dispense these supernatural favours according to our humour or caprice, but according to that order which his infinite wisdom has established, as St. Cyprian speaks.

There is no danger, no temptation, indeed, but we may conquer with his divine assistance. His grace preserved Abraham amidst the errors of idolatry, Loth in the centre of Sodom, Daniel at the court of Nabuchodonosor. It preserved the principles of Job amidst the contagion of infidelity ; the chastity of Joseph from the solicitations of his master's wife, and the virtue of Susanna against the assaults of two old lechers, who were intent on her destruction. But these were occasions to which they had not exposed themselves of their own accord ; they were placed in those critical situations by the ordinance of Divine Providence, and by the hand of God himself, who therefore supported them with his grace, and preserved them from falling on these occasions. If it is God who calls and sends you under similar circumstances ; if it be the order of Heaven and the will of Providence, that you should enter the lists with the enemies of your salvation, and that your fidelity should be put to the proof by severe trials and combats, you may walk on with an humble confidence that God will be your protector and safeguard in the midst of the greatest dangers ; his grace will support you in the day of battle, and insure you the victory : it will make you rise superior to all hostile attacks, and to all the evil solicitations that may assail you, provided you arm yourselves with the spiritual weapons of fervent prayer and Christian vigilance. It will enable you to conquer those dreadful sallies of passion that you are frequently exposed to by the profligacy of a wicked, turbulent, drunken husband ; by the peevish temper of a cross, ill-humoured, scolding wife, or by the like dangerous occasions which are unavoidable, and which, consistent with your indispensable duty, you have it not in your power to quit. On the contrary, if, of your own accord, you voluntarily and deliberately expose yourselves to the evident danger of sin, and run into the occasion, from which you may easily be disengaged, you have no reason to hope that God will work a miracle in order to authorize your presumption. How can you expect, amidst the occasions of sin into which you rashly venture, to command, whenever you please, that grace which the Antonies, the Hilarions, the Pauls, and so many other devout recluses were not sure to find in the most retired solitude, and in the practice of the most austere penance ? Is not your presumption a just reason for God to forsake and leave you to your own weakness, and permit you to fall into surprising frailties, which will cover you with confusion before him and before the world.

The Lord sometimes suffers the brightest stars to be eclipsed, and lets the just be perverted and become criminal, when relying on their own strength and self sufficiency they fear not to seek the dangerous occasions of sin ; whilst on the other hand he succours and assists those who, diffident of themselves, place all their trust and strength in his all-powerful arm. Two memorable examples will elucidate this truth ; one is of St.

Peter, the other of St. Paul. They were both in the city of Jerusalem, both in the same occasion, and both seemingly of the same disposition. They were to appear in the presence of a judge to support the interest of their Divine Master, and either publicly to renounce Jesus Christ, or to declare for him aloud. Peter said to the Saviour of the world on the eve of his passion, and though it should cost him his life he never would deny him. The language of St. Paul was the same; though, said he, I should be bound, imprisoned and condemned to death, I am ready to endure all rather than forsake Jesus Christ, Acts, xxi. Here are words and sentiments seemingly the same, on one side and the other; but, alas! the event is quite different. Peter falls, and shamefully denies his Lord and Master. Paul is unshaken in his resolution, and publicly espouses the cause of his Redeemer. Whence comes this difference? It is because Peter, too confident of himself, and contrary to the advice of the Son of God, sought the occasion, went of his own accord in the way of temptation, entered the house of Caiphas, mixed with bad company, and conversed with the enemies of Jesus Christ. But this was not the case of St. Paul. If he appears in the palace of the governor, it was the Holy Ghost who conducted him there, Acts, xx. Had he exposed himself to the occasion, of his own accord, the grace of God might have been justly withdrawn from him, and he might have been permitted to fall like Peter, who, for want of a perfect docility to the orders of Heaven, and a continual watchfulness over himself, was suffered to fall at the voice of a servant maid, in a place to which he was not called by the Almighty, though afterwards, when he was cited before the tribunals of tyrants by the divine command, he was immovable and indefatigable in bearing testimony to the sacred name of Jesus.

We read also in the Old Testament, that when Sampson, of his own accord ventured to face the greatest danger, from the over-great confidence he had in his own strength, the Lord departed from him at that very time and left him to his own weakness, to fall a victim to his temerity, Judg. c. xvi. v. 20. What happened to David, that Prince according to God's own heart? Walking one day in the hall of his palace he perceived Bathsheba, the wife of Urias, at a distance; but though she was afar off, alas! his passion was but too near him, as St. Augustine speaks; *Mulier longè, libido propè*. His ruin was at hand though he was a Prophet, because he did not take the necessary precaution to retire from the place, and turn off his eyes from the dangerous object and immediate occasion of sin. One too curious a glance of his eye made him become, at once, a murderer and an adulterer. Hence St. John Chrysostom cries out and says, O, how do I fear for the man who does not fear for himself! He is then the most weak when he thinks himself the strongest; he is then most liable to fall when he flatters

himself that he is proof against all danger, as it is then that God is most provoked to punish his presumption by withdrawing his all-powerful hand, and not granting him those special graces which he renders himself unworthy of, by wilfully meeting and remaining in the occasion of sin; nay, it is then that the enemy of mankind acquires a greater power over him, and is furnished with arms to oppose him with more force, and to accomplish his entire ruin.

In effect, my brethren, what are the most powerful weapons Satan makes use of to destroy your souls? Your passions. And what is it that influences and inflames your passions? Those sensible objects which present themselves to you, with all the attractives that are most seducing and engaging. And what draws you within the reach of those dangerous objects? The occasions, that is, those assemblies where the world displays its vanities with pomp and ostentation; those places, those nocturnal meetings, where intemperance is indulged and the flesh is pampered; those comedies, amorous novels, and other pernicious books which are read with attention, and which spread irreligion and corruption throughout the soul; those private visits and interviews; those unbecoming liberties and dangerous familiarities; those licentious discourses, double entendres and immodest songs that fill the mind with filthy ideas, and make deep and mortal wounds in the heart. These are the occasions where concupiscence is roused, where the passions are inflamed, where fuel is added to fire, and, in a word, where sin and hell make their dreadful ravages to the eternal ruin of thousands of souls. If you run into these dangers, and entangle yourselves in these snares, how can you flatter yourselves with the hopes of victory? Will you not diminish your strength, augment your weakness, second your inclinations to evil, and become an easier prey to the malice of the devil? He requires but a small beginning on our side, but one only overture on our part, to gain an ascendant over us. What then must it be if we open to him all the doors of our heart, all the avenues and windows of our soul? We are all vessels of clay; a light shock, a small stroke, is sufficient to shatter us to pieces. What must it be if we let loose the reins to all our senses, expose our souls to every temptation, and give ourselves the liberty to see all, to hear all, to be one in every party of pleasure, to be in the midst of danger, to be present in all those companies and places where modesty is ridiculed, where religion is laughed at, where piety is run down, where innocence is put to the blush, where vice triumphs, and the world is decked out in all its most tempting allurements? You know how contagious the air of the world is, and therefore you should not expose yourselves to the danger of catching the infection. You should fly its insidious pleasures, profane joys, vain intrigues, luxuries and follies, which are so apt to effeminate the soul and nourish the deprav-

vity of the human heart. If the strongest pillars have been shaken, should not weak and frail reeds tremble for themselves? Should we not all beware of running into the dangerous occasions of sin, since, *he who loves the danger shall perish in it*. If he be in the state of grace, the occasion will make him fall, as I have already shewn you; and if he be in the state of sin, the occasion will hinder him from rising out of it, as I will now briefly shew you in a few words.

As God withdraws his special graces from the just, when, of their own accord, they engage themselves in the occasion of sin, it is not to be supposed he will grant these graces to sinners whilst they are unwilling to quit the occasion. It is then a consequence naturally inferred from what I have hitherto advanced, that the sinner will never rise from the state of sin whilst he is unwilling to separate from the dangerous occasion of it, and that he will not be able to obtain a complete victory in those circumstances in which the just are overcome, and meet with difficulties almost insurmountable, especially as the sinner has more obstacles to surmount in the occasion, in order to rise from the actual state of sin, than the just man has to keep himself in the state of grace and innocence; for when the sinner's heart is once engaged, and vicious habits have taken deep root in it; when a criminal passion has, by a long prescription, gained a tyrannical ascendant over it, and plunged the unhappy sinner into an abyss of iniquity, and into the thickest shades of infernal darkness, nothing less than a miracle in the order of grace is requisite to break the chains with which he is fettered, and emancipate him from the galling yoke under which he groans. Whilst he remains in the occasion, he will constantly fall into crimes still more and more heinous, and his case will grow continually worse and worse; for, as whilst the cause of a corporal infirmity is not removed from the body, the disorder still increases every day, and the strength of the patient is gradually diminished, till nature becomes quite exhausted; thus the sinner falls from one sin into another, and sin being an abyss without bottom, into which he daily descends, the more he descends the more difficult it is for him to rise out of it. It was thus the occasion destroyed Solomon, the wisest and most enlightened of men, but a sad monument of the weakness of man, and of the dreadful consequence of remaining in the occasion of sin. Had he separated himself from the unhappy women who seduced him, he would not have fallen into the frightful precipice of so many crimes, nor have been led into excesses so shameful and so unbecoming his rank and character, at least he would have returned soon to his God; but because he did not turn them off as he should have done, but persisted obstinately in conversing with them, after forgetting himself he forgot the God of his forefathers, passed from adultery into idolatry, and blindly adored as many idols as were presented to him, 3 Kings, c. xi.

In vain, therefore, my brethren, do you flatter yourselves with the hopes of recovering the grace of God, whilst you are unwilling to remove that object which is the cause of your criminal disorders, or to shun the company and quit that house where you are exposed to the evident danger of eternal damnation. Make as many fair promises as you please at the sacred tribunal of Penance, form as many fine projects of conversion as you will, they are not to be relied on whilst you continue wilfully in the dangerous occasion of sin, and, like those insects that play about the flames that scorch them, adhere to those objects that have so frequently proved your ruin. By refusing to renounce and shun the cause of your relapses, you plainly shew that you retain interiorly in your heart a secret affection for sin, and you cannot be deemed a true and sincere penitent, or capable of being admitted to a participation of the holy Sacraments; for the criterion by which a true and sincere conversion may be distinguished from a false one, is to fly from sin, and from the occasions of it, as from the face of a venomous serpent, according to the important advice of the Holy Ghost, Eccles. xxi.

Let me, therefore, entreat you to keep at the greatest distance from the rock on which you have so often split. Let me beseech you to walk no longer on the brink of a precipice, where you are continually exposed to the danger of perishing. Break off, without further delay, those criminal engagements by which you are enslaved, and separate yourselves from all the dangerous occasions of sin, which, according to St. Peter Chrysologus, are so many smoking firebrands that are apt to be rekindled by the slightest breath. Assist us, O Lord, that we may escape the dangers which environ us on every side in the tempestuous ocean of this world, where so many rocks are hid, so many storms arise, and the current naturally carries us on unless we are guided and supported by thy all-powerful grace. Thy saints themselves have trembled at the very thoughts hereof. Penetrate us, we beseech thee, with the same salutary fear, that it may excite our vigilance and make us live with more circumspection, till we arrive, with the aid of thy divine grace, at the fortunate term of a happy eternity. Which I sincerely wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On Prayer.

Et quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis. — Jo. c. xvi. v. 23.

If ye ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it ye.

St. John, c. xvi. v. 23.

THERE is nothing more necessary or advantageous to man than prayer; by it we discover our wants, and display our miseries before the throne of the Most High, and by an holy violence, as it were, compel the divine mercy to be propitious to our cries; it is the ordinary channel through which all blessings flow from above; it is the shield and armour of a Christian, and the strongest fence against the devil; it is, as St. Augustine calls it, the key of Heaven, that unlocks the treasures of God, and gives men free access to the riches of his divine bounty. It was by prayer that Elias opened and shut the sluices of Heaven when he pleased, and caused fire to descend from above to consume his sacrifice. It was by prayer that Josue made the sun stand in the midst of its course. The prayer of Moses contributed more to the signal victory which Josue gained over the army of the Amalekites, than all the weapons of Israel; for, as long as his hands were raised up to Heaven, his prayers drew down a blessing on the army of Israel; and he no sooner ceased from prayer, and let down his hands, (being unable to keep them in that painful posture as many hours as the battle lasted) but the Amalekites began to prevail. It was by prayer that the Prophet Daniel was preserved unhurt in the lions' den, and the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace of Babylon. It was by prayer that the chains of St. Peter, when in prison, were broken asunder, and that St. Paul was protected and helped amidst the many dangers and difficulties which he had to encounter, 2 Cor. c. i. v. 11. Rom. c. xv. v. 30.

There is no favour but may be obtained by the means of prayer. *Ask and ye shall receive, says our Lord in the Gospel; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you,* Matt. c. vii. v. 7. Such is the bounty and liberality of our God, and so wonderful is his condescension, goodness and compassion for us, that he allows us free access to the throne of his mercy and grace at any hour of the day or of the night, with a po-

sitive assurance of meeting always with a favourable audience whenever we please. He offers us an infallible remedy to redress all our grievances, and promises to give us every thing we want provided we only ask for it. May not our perdition, then, be justly laid at our own door, if we neglect having recourse to him in all our necessities, both spiritual and temporal? Can we shew a greater contempt of his blessings, or undervalue his gracious favours more, than by neglecting to ask for them, or by asking for them with indifference, as if they were not worth asking for? It is true, indeed, he does not stand in need of us, or of our prayers; he knows our wants before we open our mouths to implore his assistance, and he is inclined to help us, but he is willing that we should be sensible of our own indigence and misery, and that we should fly to him for relief; nay, he presses and solicits us to approach with confidence, and for our greater encouragement our Divine Redeemer has solemnly engaged his word in the Gospel of this day, that his heavenly Father will grant us *all things whatsoever we shall ask in his name*. We must, therefore, either question the veracity of his words, or conclude that our prayers will certainly be crowned with success, if there be no fault or defect on our side that justly deserves a refusal. To guard you against those defects, and to instruct you properly in the nature of a duty so closely connected with your salvation, is the design of the following discourse. In the first point, I intend to lay before you the nature and necessity of prayer; and in the second point, to shew you the qualities and conditions with which our prayers must be accompanied, in order to render them effectual and acceptable in the sight of God. Let us implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed mother of Jesus, greeting her with the words of the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

Our manifold necessities, both spiritual and corporal, the depravity and infirmities of our nature, the various dangers to which we are constantly exposed, our inability to do the least good of ourselves the frequent temptations of the devil, the world and the flesh, which we have to combat and overcome, are convincing proofs of the indispensable obligation and absolute necessity of prayer. *Watch and pray says our Lord, that you may not enter into temptation*, Matt. xxvi. v. 41. St. Paul, 1 Thess. v. 17. will have us *to pray always without intermission*, and to seek the face of the Lord evermore, as we are always in need of his help; not that the Apostle means that we should be incessantly on our knees, or evermore actually thinking of God, as this would be incompatible with our weakness and the different obligations of our respective states; but that we are to walk evermore in the presence of God, to raise our hearts frequently to him from time to time, to have a constant intention and desire of pleasing him, and to offer up all our actions to his honour and glory. St. John Chrysostom says, that they are unworthy of the name of Christians who neglect morning and

evening prayer, whereby the windows of the soul are opened to the light of grace, and shut against the darkness of sin and the illusions of the devil. Morning and evening prayer is a tribute we owe to our great Creator, as our first beginning and last end; it is an homage due to his Sovereign Majesty, in testimony of his supreme dominion over us, and our total dependance on him in all things; it is an humble attestation of our own indigence and insufficiency, and a grateful acknowledgment of God's infinite goodness and of our entire confidence in him; it is a submission in which the Almighty will have us live, that thereby having a continual recourse to him in all our necessities, we may be inviolably devoted to his service all the days of our life. Hereby we pay him a religious worship as our Lord, we adore him as our Creator, we honour him as our Father; hereby we praise and thank him as our benefactor, we invoke him as our protector, our preserver, our comfort, our refuge and our help in all our wants; hereby we own him to be the author of all good, the source of all holiness, and the giver of all gifts. These are duties that religion prescribes and commands; they are frequently inculcated in the Scripture, and have been always regularly practised by all the Saints and Servants of God, both in the old and new Testament, who thought it incumbent on them to offer up their prayers to the Lord, not only every morning and evening, but several other times in the day. To pass over numberless instances hereof, it is recorded of the Prophet Daniel, that he chose rather to be thrown into a den of lions than to neglect this important duty three stated times every day, Dan. c. vi. King David also rose at midnight to pray, though he performed the same duty seven times a day at stated hours, as he informs us in Ps. cxviii. where he says, *Seven times a day have I given praise to thee, O Lord.* What is more, he says in Ps. xxxiii. *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be always in my mouth.* We read in the Acts, c. vi. v. 4. that the Apostles *gave themselves up continually to prayer.* When they were preparing themselves for the coming of the Holy Ghost, *they all continued unanimously in prayer,* c. i. v. 14. When they were about choosing St. Matthias, to fill up the place of Judas, and the seven deacons to manage the temporalities of the Church; and when they were about sending Saul and Barnabas on their mission to preach the Gospel, they had recourse to *prayer and fasting,* c. i. 6, 12. Nay, Christ himself, though he had no need of praying on his own account, or for himself, frequently passed whole hours, and sometimes whole nights in prayer, to convince us by his own example of the necessity of prayer, and to excite us to the frequent exercise of this religious duty. Hence the primitive Christians were so addicted to prayer, *that their hearts and conversation might be truly said to be in Heaven, where their treasure was.* Besides beginning and ending every day with God, by morning and evening prayer, they were accustomed to raise

their thoughts to him often in the course of the day, whilst their hands were employed at work, and undertook nothing without first offering it to his greater honour and glory. They looked upon themselves here on earth as in a place of exile and in a foreign country far from their native home, like unto the children of Israel in the captivity of Babylon; and therefore they constantly longed for the end of their mortal pilgrimage, and daily aspired towards heavenly Jerusalem by fervent and devout prayer.

All this plainly shews that prayer is one of the most necessary duties of a Christian. It is the ordinary means appointed by God, and required as a condition on our part, for obtaining the helps and graces that are necessary to salvation; it differs from the other means of salvation herein, that the want of it cannot be supplied by any thing else. The want of actual baptism may be supplied by martyrdom, as was the case of the holy innocents; the want of the sacrament of penance may be supplied by perfect contrition; those who are unable to fast, or practice the rigorous austerities of self denial and mortification, may supply the want of them by alms deeds; and the poor have it in their power to supply their want of alms-deeds by bearing their crosses and afflictions with patience and resignation to the divine will; but the want of prayer can be supplied by nothing else; so that if it be neglected the graces annexed and promised to it will not be bestowed, for this reason, because they are not asked as St. James observes, c. iv. v. 2. *You have not, because you ask not.* The grace of prayer itself is never wanting to us; it is a gift of God; for, as St. Paul says, *of ourselves we are not sufficient to think even a good thought; we know not even what we should pray for; nor can we say Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Spirit.* But God, out of his infinite mercy, bestows the grace of prayer upon all men as the first step towards their salvation, moving them to have recourse to him, and giving them the ability to pray. He commands them to pray, which presupposes that they have grace to do so, since as the Council of Trent observes, Sess. 6. c. 11. "God does not command impossibilities; but by commanding us, he admonishes us to do what we can, to pray for whatever help we stand in need of, and then he helps and enables us to do the good he commands;" so that if we be so devoid of religion, and so careless about our salvation as to neglect prayer, the principal means to secure it, we may justly blame ourselves for all the fatal consequences of so culpable a neglect.

Prayer is founded upon faith and hope, and implies the most perfect acts of religion. The idea of it is not to be confined to petition only, as those people seem to imagine who appear only in the divine presence with hands lifted up to receive the favours of Heaven. They call upon God to represent to him their wants, and have a heart but to wish, and a tongue but to ask; they are fervent and eloquent in petitioning, but cool,

languid, and deficient in blessing, praising and thanking the Lord for the benefits received. It is therefore to be remarked, that by prayer is understood an elevation of the mind and of the heart to Heaven, or a conversation, address and discourse of the soul with God; and as this may be done five different ways, there are for this reason five different kinds of prayer; meditation, oblation, thanksgiving, petition and adoration. These again may be performed either internally or externally, either in private or in public; for which reason prayer is also distinguished by the appellations of mental and vocal, public and private prayer. Mental or internal prayer, otherwise called meditation, is performed in the heart, without being expressed in words. Vocal prayer is performed with the tongue, or by word of mouth. A daily meditation, at least for half an hour, is strongly recommended as one of the most effectual means to improve in the love of God, and to advance in virtue. It is to the neglect of it that the Scripture attributes all the disorders of mankind. *With desolation is all the earth made desolate*, says the Prophet Jeremy, c. xii. v. 11. *because there is no one that considers in his heart*. Public or common prayer is that which the faithful, united together in a body, offer up in the public worship of the Church, or which a whole family, or a number of devout Christians assembled at home, or in an oratory, offers up together. Our blessed Saviour teaches us, in the *Lord's Prayer*, to pray as if many were assembled together; and he assures us, Matt. c. xviii. *that where two or three are assembled thus in his name, he is in the midst of them*. Hence St. John Chrysostom says, Homil. 3. *You do not pray so well, nor do you obtain so much when you pray alone to the Lord, as when you pray unanimously with your brethren*. But what are qualities and conditions of prayer? This is what I promised to lay before you in the second point.

If we are willing that God should hear us in our prayers, says St. Gregory, we must hear him in his commandments, since it is not every one that says *Lord, Lord, that shall be saved, but he who does the will of my Father in Heaven*, as our Blessed Saviour speaks in the Gospel. To partake of all the advantages annexed to prayer, it should be performed in the state of grace, for it is *the prayer of the just man that prevaileth much*, as St. James tells us, c. v. v. 16, and as the Royal Prophet says, Ps. xxxiii. v. 17. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears are open to their prayers; but his countenance is against them that do evil things, and wilfully persist in mortal sin. When they stretch forth their hands, he turns away his eyes from them*, as the Prophet Isaias speaks, c. i. v. 15. *and when they multiply their prayers, he will not hear*. However, if a Christian be so unhappy as to be involved in the guilt of mortal sin, he is not therefore to neglect prayer, since the more criminal he is, the more he stands in need of it, and the more diligent he should

be in praying for the grace of a true conversion, and imploring the mercy of God. Prayer, accompanied with a sincere purpose of amendment, is his only resource; and the examples of the humble publican and of the prodigal son, should be an encouragement to him, as they shew how ready the Lord is to hear the prayers of the greatest sinners, when they return to him in the sincerity of their hearts, and cry to him for mercy and pardon. The publican was justified by this short prayer, *God be merciful to me a sinner*; the penitent thief on the cross found mercy by crying out, *Lord remember me when thou comest to thy kingdom*; which is a proof that God requires the desires of the heart more than a multitude of words; nay, it is an abuse reprov'd by Jesus Christ, to multiply many vain idle words in prayer without the spirit of devotion. *When you pray*, says he, Matt. c. vi. v. 7, *speaking not much as the heathens do, for they think that they are heard by reason of their speaking much*. It were better to say a few prayers from the heart, than to turn over so many leaves in our books of devotion through mere custom, and run through a confused jumble and rotation of vocal prayers in an irreverent and disorderly manner; for when the mind is not raised to God, and the heart does not perform its part as well as the tongue, we can no more be said to pray, than a person who would repeat with his mouth the same number of vocal prayers in his sleep or out of his senses. In a word, attention is the spirit and soul of prayer, and if it be wanting prayer is defective in its very substance, it being essentially a raising up of the mind and heart to God, or in other terms, the desires of the heart and soul expressed in words. Let the lips and the tongue, therefore, be ever so busily employed, unless our hearts and thoughts be fixed on God, it is only praying in outward appearance and not in effect; it is only praying like the Pharisees, of whom Christ complains in the Gospel, and says, *This people honoureth me with their lips but their heart is far from me*, Matt. c. xv. v. 7. How can such persons expect that God will give attention to their petitions, when they pay no attention themselves to what they pray for? Is it not dishonouring God to address his Divine Majesty with such disrespect, such coolness, such indifference, and to pretend to manifest to him the desires of the heart, when the heart is no way concerned, nor has any sincere or earnest desire of obtaining what the words express, but is wandering upon worldly objects, and occupied with wilful distractions? It is necessary to discharge all foreign thoughts, and to keep a close guard upon our mind and upon our heart, when we go to prayer. We should prepare our souls for appearing in the divine presence with due respect, according to the admonition of the Holy Ghost, Eccles. c. xviii. v. 32. *Before prayer prepare thy soul, and do not resemble a man that tempteth God*. This preparation consists in calling to mind the presence of God, in keeping a lively sense of it during the time of prayer,

and in directing our intention to a good end. Our Blessed Saviour instructs us, Matt. c. vi. v. 5. about the purity of intention which we ought to have in praying: *When you pray, says he, you shall not be like hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the corner of streets, that they may be seen by men; but go into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy father in private, and thy father, who seeth in private, will reward thee.* This shews that true devotion seeks only to please God in the closet of the heart; and whilst it edifies by all marks of a solid piety in places of public worship, it avoids all ostentation, vanity, singularity and pharisaical affectation. Humility is another condition of good prayer; the Scripture tells us, that *the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds*, Eccles. c. xxxv. v. 21. and that *God resisteth the proud, and giveth his grace to the humble*, St. James, c. iv. v. 6. *He hath regard to the prayer of the humble*, says the Royal Prophet, Ps. c. vi. v. 18, and *he hath not despised their petition*; and again, Ps. xxxiii. v. 19. *he is nigh to them that are of a contrite heart, and he will save the humble of spirit.* The efficacy of humble prayer appears evidently in the poor publican, in the prodigal son, in the centurion, mentioned Matt. c. viii. and in the Cananean woman, who being told by our Blessed Saviour that *the bread of children was not to be cast to the dogs*, was so far from being discouraged at this humiliating expression, that she persisted in her prayer, and modestly replied, that *whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.* By this humiliation and debasement of herself, she moved the tender and compassionate heart of Jesus to grant her petition and dispossess her daughter of an evil spirit. Matt. c. xv. v. 22. If we therefore wish to render our prayers acceptable to God, and available to ourselves, we must beware of following the example of the proud Pharisee, who confided in his own justice, depended on his own merits, and presumptuously imagined that he was worthy that his prayers should be heard. Far from entertaining such groundless ideas, or being carried away by such haughty and presumptuous notions, which bespeak a malediction rather than a blessing, we are to renounce all self-confidence, and to throw ourselves entirely on the mercy and goodness of God, and his fidelity to his promises; we are to prostrate ourselves like the publican, as criminals, in the most submissive posture, with a reverential awe, and with an inward humility of soul, at the feet of our offended Lord. We are to lay open to his eyes all the wounds of our souls, that they may be healed. We are to represent all our wants and necessities to him, like poor, indigent supplicants earnestly craving a charitable alms, and fervently praying for relief with a sincere desire and wish to obtain it. We are to be penetrated with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, not only to obtain the mercy we implore, but even to lift up our eyes, or to appear and speak in the presence of so great a Majesty. Such were the sentiments of the Patriarch Abra-

ham, when he said, *Shall I presume to speak to the Lord, I who am nothing but dust and ashes?* Such likewise would be our sentiments, were we but thoroughly convinced of our misery, indigence and inability to do the least thing towards our salvation, of ourselves and by our own natural strength. The next condition that must accompany our prayers is a lively unshaken faith, or a firm confidence and trust in God's boundless power, goodness and mercy. This condition is so necessary, that St. Augustine says, *Si fides deficit, oratio perit* : If faith be wanting prayer is lost. Our Blessed Saviour required this disposition in the two blind men to whom he restored their sight, Matt. c. ix. v. 2. and in the sick man whom he miraculously cured of the palsy, and commanded to *take up his bed and walk*. A soul full of this holy confidence is like unto a sacred vessel into which the divine mercy pours the treasures of its grace, and the greater the confidence is, the greater also are the heavenly favours and blessings that prayer draws into such a soul. On the contrary, diffidence or despondency makes a person unworthy of God's favours; it binds and shuts up his hands and stops the course of his graces. Christ checked his disciples for this defect saying, *O ye of little faith, why have ye doubted?* It was for this reason that Peter began to sink when he was walking on the surface of the sea; it was on the same account that neither he, nor any of his companions, were able to cast out the devil, spoken of in St. Mark, c. ix. which gave our Saviour occasion to say to them, *If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*; and again, in c. xi. v. 24. *Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, that whatsoever shall say to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea, and if he shall not stagger in his heart, but shall believe that whatsoever he shall say will be done, the same shall be done for him; therefore I say to you, all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believe that you shall receive, and they shall happen to you.* This is sufficient to shew how necessary it is to present your petitions to God with a certain and assured confidence of success, firmly believing that he is both able and willing to grant your requests, and hoping without hesitation or any diffidence, that he will actually grant them according to his promise. Hence St. James, c. i. v. 5. advises us *to ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is driven and tossed about by the wind; let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord.* Another condition of prayer is, to present our petitions *in the name of Jesus Christ*, who has assured us *that whatsoever we shall ask the Father in his name, shall be given to us.* He is the Mediator of our redemption; he is our Advocate and our High Priest; and there is *no other name under Heaven given to men whereby we must be saved*, Acts c. iv. v. 12. He has purchased for us the graces which we pray for, and it is *through him that we are to go with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in sea-*

sumble aid, Heb. c. iv. v. 16. His infinite merits are the foundation on which we are to ground our hopes. To pray for things which we erroneously imagine would be a means to promote our happiness, but which God foresees would prove an obstacle to our salvation, and become the occasion of the eternal ruin and loss of our souls, if our desires were gratified the way we ask, is not praying in the name of Jesus, as St. Augustine remarks, Tract 102 in Jo. where he says, *Whatever is asked of the Father contrary to his honour, or prejudicial to our salvation, is not asked in the name of Jesus; though his sacred name may be interposed; consequently, we are not to imagine that God breaks his word if he refuse to grant our requests in this case.* It is a great mercy in him to be then deaf to our cries, and to pay no regard to our mistaken petitions. *What man is there among you, says our Saviour, Matt. c. vii. v. 9. of whom if his son ask bread, will he reach him a stone; or if he ask a fish will he reach him a serpent? If then you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in Heaven, give good things to them that ask him?* We ought to seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and as to all other things that are truly good and expedient, if we ask them as we ought they will be granted to us, not indeed always at the moment, and in the manner and measure we desire, but at the time and in the manner God knows they will be of most real service to us. We ought, therefore, to make his holy will the sole rule and measure of all our desires, and take care not to provoke him by our impatience, murmurs or complaints, to lay aside the tenderness of a father, and grant us in his justice what we ask to our own prejudice. Spiritual blessings, such as the grace of God, the great gift of final perseverance, the remission of our sins, a happy death, strength to resist temptations, and the like, are to be prayed for absolutely, in imitation of the Royal Prophet, who says, *One thing I have asked of the Lord, and that I will insist on, which is, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*, Ps. xxvi. v. 7. But temporal blessings, such as wealth, health, and the goods of fortune, which are liable to be abused, should not be prayed for otherwise than conditionally, if the Lord sees that they are conducive to his own honour, and expedient for the salvation of our souls.

Perseverance is the last condition of a good prayer, for as it is the crown of virtue, so it gives the finishing stroke to the efficacy of prayer. Christ marks out this condition in the parable of the man, who, after coming to his friend's house at midnight to borrow three loaves, was at first refused, but by continuing to beg and knock at the door, got admittance at length, and obtained his request, Luke, c. xi. and again, in the parable of the poor widow, who, by her importunities and repeated entreaties prevailed upon the unjust judge to do her justice, Luke, c. xviii. The Cananean woman, likewise, over-

came our Blessed Saviour by her importunity, and forced him, by a holy violence, to grant to her perseverance what he had denied to her first prayer. The blind beggarman, also, on the road of Jericho, was not restored to his sight the first time he cried out, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me*; but when he raised his voice higher, and redoubled the fervour of his prayer, his unwearied perseverance became a kind of violence, that moved Christ our Lord to enlighten the eyes both of his soul and body. It is evident, then, that God is willing to be importuned, and that if he sometimes defers granting our requests, it is to make us sensible of the value of his gifts, to try our fidelity and submission, to reward our patience, to make us redouble our fervour, and continue striking at the gate of mercy until it is opened. Those who put their trust in him, and pray with the necessary dispositions, are never confounded, but are sure, sooner or later, to receive the effects of his goodness; so that, if our prayers in general often prove fruitless and ineffectual, it is our own fault; it is because they are defective in some respect; it is because they are not duly performed or attended with the proper qualities and conditions; it is because we pray for things that are inexpedient or prejudicial to our salvation; it is because we render ourselves unworthy of receiving what we sue for; it is, in fine, because we do not pray for what we ought, nor in the manner we ought, according to these words of St. James in his catholic Epistle, c. iv. v. 3. *You ask, and you receive not, because you do not ask as you ought.*

O merciful Jesus, who hast promised that they who ask shall receive, vouchsafe to pour forth into our hearts the true spirit of prayer, and grant that we may perform this heavenly exercise in a manner acceptable to thee, so as to experience the effects of thy goodness and the truth of thy promises, in the success of our petitions. Possess our souls with a sacred awe of thy divine presence. Give us the spirit of fervour and devotion, that our prayers may ascend like a sweet incense and find acceptance in thy sight; for by uniting ourselves thus here on earth with the choirs of thy blessed Angels and Saints, in the homage which they pay thee in Heaven, we may confidently expect to join them hereafter, in singing thy immortal praises for a never-ending eternity. Which, my dear brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

THE THIRD DAY OF MAY.

On the Sacred Mystery of the Holy Cross.

Mihi autem absit gloriari nisi in Cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi.

Galat. c. vi. v. 14.

For my part, God forbid I should glory in any thing but in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Galat. c. vi. v. 14.

THE Church celebrates, on this day, the annual festival of the Finding of the Cross, on which our Divine Redeemer vouchsafed to lay down his life for our sake. The Jews had interred this cross in a deep pit, along with the title which was fixed to it, and with the nails which had pierced our Saviour's hands and feet, for they looked upon them as detestable objects that ought to be removed out of sight, because their Law pronounced *those accursed who were hanged on a cross*. Hence it was usual with them to condemn none but the vilest slaves and the most notorious malefactors to die on a cross, that kind of punishment being deemed by them the most shameful and the most infamous that could be inflicted on any criminal. It was for this very reason that they chose the death of the cross for our Blessed Saviour, and cried out unanimously to Pilate, *Let us condemn him to the most ignominious death*; for they imagined the most infamous death too honourable, and the most painful too mild for the Son of God. But to their eternal shame and confusion, the cross that was a *scandal* and stumbling-block to them, and a *folly to the Gentiles*, as St. Paul speaks, 1 Cor. i. became to the faithful an object of veneration, and to the elect a convincing proof of the power and wisdom of God; for when peace was restored to the Church, after a violent persecution of three hundred years, Constantine the Great, the first Christian Prince that was raised by Divine Providence to the imperial throne, having gained a signal victory over the tyrant Maxentius, by virtue of a cross, which, as Eusebius relates, appeared visibly to him and to his whole army, formed in the air of pure light, with this inscription, *In hoc signo vinces*: By this sign thou shalt conquer; the cross began immediately to be held in great respect, and to be regarded as an object of honour and glory. About the same time Helen, the pious mother of Constantine, having zealously undertaken a journey into Palestine in search of the identical cross on which our

Blessed Redeemer had consummated his sacrifice, miraculously found the precious treasure she went in quest of, after destroying the profane buildings and the marble statues of Jupiter and Venus, which had been erected there out of an aversion to Christianity, in order to conceal the place of Christ's burial, and to obliterate the memory of his death and passion. The cross was then carried in public procession, and a representation of it was stamped on the Emperor's coin and on the colours and standards of his army, instead of the imperial eagles. From being an instrument of the most ignominious death, it became the most valuable pearl and the most conspicuous ornament in the crowns of Kings and Princes. It was transferred says St. Augustine, from the places of execution to the foreheads of Emperors, Constantine having enacted a law that the cross should no longer be used as an instrument of punishment; he likewise ordered the painters and statuaries to represent his royal person with a globe in his right hand, and a cross over the globe, to denote that Christ had subdued the world by the cross and not by the sword, according to the expression of St. Augustine.

This is the glorious victory, which the Church frequently commemorates in her divine office between Easter and the Ascension of our Lord; and this is the sublime mystery which I will endeavour to display at present, in order to inflame your hearts more and more with the love of Christ crucified, and to shew you that the devotion which we are directed to pay to his cross, is so far from being superstitious or unlawful, that it is truly pious and religious, and productive of many salutary affections in the soul. Let us previously invoke the intercession of the blessed Virgin, greeting her in the words of the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The cross is taken in three different senses or significations. First, by it is understood the real and identical cross, on which our Divine Redeemer expired for our sake on Mount Calvary, and which was miraculously found by the pious Empress Helen near Jerusalem in the year 362. About three hundred years afterwards it was exalted with great solemnity by the Emperor Heraclius, and a considerable part of it was translated to the city of Rome, where it is still to be seen in a magnificent church, called the *Church of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem*. Secondly, the cross signifies an image or picture of Christ crucified, commonly called a *Crucifix*, or a representation figure, and sign of the real cross, such as is formed with the hand in blessing ourselves or others. Thirdly, the cross is taken in a moral and mystical sense, to signify the spiritual cross of mortification, penance, persecution and sufferings, which a Christian should be disposed to bear patiently all the days of his life, so as to be able to say with St. Paul, *With Christ I am fastened to the cross*; and again, *the world is crucified to me, and I to the world*. It is in this sense that the following words

of the Gospel are to be understood : *whoever will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me ; for he who carries not his cross and follows me, is not worthy of me.* The faithful in all nations, ever since the purest ages of Christianity, have always paid, and will continue unto the end of the world to pay respect, not only to the real cross of Christ, but also to the images, pictures, and representations of said cross. In the first place, it is but just and reasonable that due respect and veneration should be paid to the real cross on account of the sanctity it received by touching and bearing the pure oblation of the sacred body of the world's Redeemer, and by being bedewed and consecrated by the sprinkling of his most precious blood. Herein the Church in the new Law differs from the ancient synagogue, which looked upon the cross with scorn, contempt and horror. The Church of Christ, on the contrary, looks upon the cross as the summit of his and our glory. She regards it as the altar whereon the innocent Lamb of God offered himself up to his eternal Father a bleeding victim for our sins. She honours it as the glorious instrument of human redemption, and the key that unlocked the gates of Heaven for mankind, after they had been shut by Adam's disobedience upwards of four thousand years. She respects it as the monument of the most illustrious triumph, and the trophy of the most famous victory that was ever gained. She esteems and prizes it as the Pastoral Staff, with which Jesus the good Shepherd of souls, defeated the infernal Goliath, and rescued his flock from becoming a prey to the malice of Satan. She, in fine, values it as the Royal Standard of her heavenly King, which is to precede him on the last day, and to appear conspicuous in the Heavens at the general judgment. It was by it that he triumphed over sin and death, subdued the rulers of this darkness, conquered the powers of hell, and established the Church upon the ruins of Paganism and the destruction of the Jewish synagogue. The cross was the first throne on which he began his spiritual monarchy ; for, as the Prophet Isaiah says, c. ix. *His principality was formed upon his shoulders, and he began to draw all nations to himself by faith, when he was exalted from the earth and elevated on the cross,* as he himself had foretold before his passion, St. John, c. xii. Hence the Royal Prophet says, that *God reigned in all nations* from the time of his exaltation *on the wood of the cross*, the prince of this world being then cast out and stripped of the tyrannical dominion which he had acquired over mankind ; for, as he had seduced and conquered our first parents by persuading them to eat of the forbidden fruit of a tree, it was expedient that he also should be conquered by the blessed fruit of another tree, and that his empire should be overthrown by the wood of the cross, which made St. Augustine call the cross the *Tree of Life*. It was formerly prefigured by the tree of life that was planted in the midst of the earthly Paradise, and by Jacob's ladder that reached up to the

gate of Heaven, by the Ark of Noe that saved the human species from the waters of the deluge, by the miraculous rod of Moses which destroyed the serpents of the Egyptian magicians, and by the pillar of fire that marched before the children of Israel through the desert, and pointed out to them the road to the Land of Promise. You may judge, then, my brethren, with how much justice and reason the Church respects and honours that cross, which Christ our Lord was pleased to choose as the happy instrument to work such wonders, to confer such blessings, and to save millions of souls from the fiery furnaces of hell; and really if the Ark of the covenant, and the sacred vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem, which Balthazar, King of Babylon, sacrilegiously profaned, and thereby drew down the vengeance of Heaven upon his own criminal head, were formerly held in great veneration and respect by the people of God; if the aprons and handkerchiefs that touched St. Paul's body were so highly valued and esteemed by the faithful, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, how much more reason have we Christians to value and esteem, to honour and respect that cross which was closely united to the adorable body of Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the effusion of that blood which redeemed us all? St. John the Baptist honoured the latchet of our Saviour's shoes, and the sick woman in the Gospel honoured the hem of his garment, and was miraculously cured by touching it with a respectful humility and a lively faith. Shall it not then be lawful and beneficial for us devoutly to honour, respect and venerate his cross, from which we have derived so many heavenly graces and blessings?

The cross or crucifix, that is made to represent the death and passion of Christ, and to preserve the memory of the real cross he was nailed to, deserves also to be honoured and respected, since both the one and the other serve to excite the same dispositions, the difference being only in the degrees of more or less. We look upon a crucifix as a compendious history of Christ's sufferings; we consider it as a book and as an abridgment of the Gospel, expressed by one letter, one signal, one only character. We behold it as a mysterious symbol, a sacred memorial, a sensible expression, and a striking representation of all the wonders of our Blessed Redeemer. At the sight of it we are instructed, moved and humbled. We are excited to a more lively remembrance of God's infinite mercies, and made sensible of the great debt of love and service we owe to him, who loved us to such an excessive degree of love. All the sentiments of piety and faith are hereby revived, and the feeling we have for his sufferings is roused and awakened within us. This naturally leads us to give outward marks and demonstrations of those inward feelings and sentiments, particularly in the pious ceremonies of Good Friday. A more proper day could not be appointed for testifying our respect for Jesus Christ, and for expressing by an outward

reverence to the memorial, the esteem, veneration, and love we have in our hearts for him, than that very day on which he vouchsafed to humble himself to the death of the cross for our sake. All the outward reverence, and all the genuflexions and humiliations of our bodies before the cross, on that or any other day, are but the language of our hearts, whereby we manifest the inward affections of our souls, and acknowledge with gratitude the boundless love and mercy of our crucified Lord, who is certainly most worthy of all this submission and most deserving of the greatest respect we are able to pay him. In short, as words are expressions of our minds, so these exterior actions are expressions and signs of our interior intention, which is nothing else but to honor and adore Jesus Christ crucified. Nothing, therefore can be more absurd, more unfair, or more unjust, than to traduce this devotion as superstitious and idolatrous, especially since it is from the intention, and not from the exterior action, that the difference of worship chiefly proceeds; for the same exterior action may be either an act of supreme worship, or of an inferior and relative honour, just as it proceeds from different intentions.

Our holy religion is so far from abetting idolatry in this or any other case whatsoever, that it teaches us positively to disclaim it, and utterly to detest it, as a most heinous crime of high treason against the Divine Majesty. Far from approving of the making any graven image, idol or imaginary God, to adore and worship it with the honour due only to the living God, we are sensible that this would be a manifest violation of the first of the Ten Commandments. We are not so stupid or so blind as to pray to the cross, or to any other image; for we know that they neither have eyes to see, nor ears to hear us. Whatever honour and respect we pay to the crucifix, or to the other sacred images of Christ or his saints, is no more than a relative honour and respect, that does not stop there, but redounds on the originals to which it is directed by our intention. We honour the crucifix for the sake of him whom it represents, and who is no idol but the true and living God. It is Jesus Christ, whose likeness it bears, that we adore and respect, and not the stuff or matter whereof it is composed; and for this reason, we deem a crucifix of wood to be worthy of the same honour that a crucifix of gold is worthy of; for we do not regard what it is in itself, nor do we honour it in the spirit of the ancient Heathens, on account of any intrinsic virtue, inherent dignity, power or divinity, but on account of the dear object which it signifies and brings to our remembrance. Such an honour as this is paid by a dutiful child to the picture of his father, by a loyal subject to the image of his sovereign, and by our separated brethren to the name of Jesus, which is no more than an image or remembrance of our Saviour to the ear, as the crucifix is an image and memorial of him to the eye. Luther himself, though he came fifteen hundred years after Christ and his Apostles to

preach up a new Gospel, and make strange innovations in the ancient faith, yet he was so sensible of the legality and antiquity of this devotion of the universal Church, that he wrote two books against his reforming disciple Carolostadius, for having presumed to revive the old condemned heresy of the Iconoclastics in his absence, by sacrilegiously pulling down the altars, and abusing the images of Christ and his saints, in the churches of Wittemberg.

And really, my brethren, why should it not be as lawful to honour and respect the cross, which is a history of Christ's sufferings when it is painted on canvas, or carved or engraved in ivory or wood, as it is lawful to honour and respect the same history when it is written on paper or printed in the book of the Gospel, since paper and types are the work of man's hand as well as sculpture and painting? Why should it not be as lawful to kiss the feet of a crucifix out of devotion to Christ crucified, as it is to kiss the Bible on taking a solemn oath? Why should it not be as lawful to uncover our heads before a crucifix or cross, as it is to uncover them before the pillars and walls of a church, or before the equestrian statue of a King? We are persuaded, that it is as lawful for us to prostrate ourselves before this sign and image of our salvation, as it was for Josue and the elders of Israel to lie prostrate on their faces, and pray before the ark of the covenant and the two golden cherubims or image-work of angels, which was placed over the oracle in the sanctuary by the express orders of God. We are convinced that it is as lawful for us to bow and kneel before a crucifix, as it is for our separated brethren to bow to their communion table, or to bend their knees to their sacrament, which they believe only to be an empty figure, sign and image of Christ's body.

The Scripture relates that in the old Law, an image of a brazen serpent was exalted in the desert by God's appointment, for the healing of such as were bitten by the fiery serpents. Our Saviour approved of the making of that serpent, and owns it to have been an emblem or type of himself exalted on the cross, in order to heal our souls from the bites of the infernal serpent; for he says, John, c. iii. v. 14. *As Moses raised up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be raised up, that every one who believes in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.*

In imitation hereof we erect a crucifix over our altars, our tabernacles, our churches and our oratories, and we look up to it with great confidence in Jesus crucified. A pious and attentive contemplation of it, can scarce fail of being productive of many salutary affections in our souls. By the sight of it we are reminded of the baseness, and led to an hatred of sin which nailed the Son of God to a cross; we are made sensible of the depth of our wounds and the malignity of our disorders, which could not be healed but by so bitter a re-

the cross of his Lord Jesus Christ, and who looked upon it as the most profound wisdom, the most sublime philosophy, the most eminent science he knew, and the most salutary doctrine he preached wherever he went.

Grant, O Divine Redeemer, that we may imitate the spirit of thy Apostle, and be penetrated with the like sentiments! Preserve us from ever becoming enemies of thy cross; and give us grace to crucify our flesh with our vices and concupiscences. Pierce our stony hearts with those nails that fastened thee to the cross, that penitential tears may flow from us in abundance to wash away the foul stains of our sins. Do not suffer us to be lost after all thou hast done for our salvation. Permit us not to frustrate the designs of thy mercy through our own obstinacy and perverseness, but make us partake of the happy fruits of thy redemption, that we may be admitted one day into those realms of bliss which thou hast purchased for us by thy sufferings on the cross. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.



ASCENSION THURSDAY.

On the triumphant Ascension of our Lord.



Assumptus est in Coelum, et sedet a dexteris Dei.—Marc. c. xvi. v. 19.

*Jesus was taken up into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God.
St. Marc. c. xvi. v. 19.*

OUR Blessed Redeemer, having accomplished the great work of man's redemption by sacrificing his life on the altar of the cross, was pleased to remain forty days here on earth after his glorious resurrection; during which time he appeared frequently to his disciples, and conversed familiarly with them, in order to confirm them in the belief of his resurrection, and to give them every necessary instruction relative to the due performance of the sacred functions of their ministry. The Scripture relates ten different apparitions, the most solemn of which happened on the very day of his triumphant ascension into Heaven; for, as St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. c. xv. *He was then seen by upwards of five hundred brethren assembled together.* We do not find that in any of these apparitions, from the day of his resurrection to the day of his ascension, he ever complained once of the cruelty of the Jews, or even made mention of the

base treatment he had received from Annas, Caiphas, Pilate and Herod ; for, as St. Luke informs us, his conversation and discourse regarded only the *kingdom of God*, that is, his Church, which he founded on earth as a spiritual kingdom, that he might reign sovereignly in the hearts of his faithful servants by his grace in this life, and that they may reign eternally with him hereafter in the kingdom of his glory. He took particular care to instruct his Apostles in the duties of the apostleship, and to expound to them the sense and meaning of the Scriptures. He treated with them about the belief of the chief mysteries of faith, and concerning the administration of the holy sacraments. He gave them the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and empowered them to forgive and retain sins by his authority, to cast out devils, and to work all kind of miracles in his name. In fine, he commissioned and commanded them to go into the whole world, and to teach and baptize all nations until his second coming on the day of the last and general judgment, promising at the same time that he would always be with them, even unto the end of the world, and, consequently, that he would be with their lawful successors ; it being evident that their successors in office were comprehended in this promise, as the Apostles were not to live always upon earth for the purpose of teaching and baptizing all nations by themselves in person, and as the Church was not to die with them, but was to stand unto the consummation of ages, and to the end of the world, in spite of all the powers of hell. Our Blessed Saviour having thus, like unto a wise architect, settled the foundations of his Church on a solid basis, and having authorized his Apostles and their successors to govern it, and to hand down the thread of faith to the faithful of all ages and of all nations, he was at length pleased to withdraw his visible presence from the earth, and to go and take possession of that bliss and happiness which was due to his victory over sin and death. Hence the Evangelist says, in the words of my text, *Jesus was taken up into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God*. Behold the glorious victory which the Church solemnizes at present with an octave, and which I will endeavour to explain to ye in the following discourse. In the first place, I will briefly describe the principal circumstances of this grand event ; and, in the second, I will point out the signal advantages we derive from it, and the salutary effects it should produce in our hearts. Let us previously invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, greeting her with the words of the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

It was on the fortieth day after Easter Sunday, and the tenth before Pentecost, that our Divine Redeemer quitted this sublunary world as to his visible presence, and mounted up to the kingdom of Heaven. He had previously apprized his disciples of his intention of leaving them, and finding that they were overwhelmed with an heavy load of grief and affliction at

the thoughts of his approaching departure, he vouchsafed to comfort them in the most affectionate manner. He laid before them the expediency of returning to his eternal Father, and the advantages that were to accrue to them from his ascension. He assured them that he would not leave them orphans, but would send down the Holy Ghost the Comforter, to abide with them and to teach them all truth. He foretold them, that after a little while they should see him again; that their hearts should then rejoice, and their joy no one should take from them. After consoling them thus, he led them out of the city of Jerusalem to a neighbouring mountain, called Mount Olivet, where, in the presence of upwards of five hundred witnesses, he lifted up his sacred hands, and, like a loving Father, he gave them his last blessing. Then leaving the print of his feet in the stone on which he stood, he raised himself from the top of the Mount into the upper regions of the air, and ascended triumphantly into Heaven. On the same spot from which he ascended, a magnificent church was afterwards erected in memory of his ascension, by the pious Empress Helen, mother of Constantine the Great, when she travelled into Palestine in search of the holy cross of our Saviour. It was from this place he chose to ascend; that where he began to be humbled by his passion, there also he might begin to be exalted and to manifest his glory. He ascended as man, both soul and body; for, as God, he never was absent from Heaven, his divinity being always every where present at the same time, and filling all places with its immensity. He ascended by his own almighty power, and not by the help of another, like unto the Prophet Elias, who was taken up in a fiery chariot, or like the Prophet Habacuc and Philip the Deacon, who were raised up into the air, and translated to distant and remote places by the assistance of Angels. He ascended in a bright cloud, accompanied with the souls of the holy Patriarchs, Prophets and Saints of the old Testament, whom he released from their tedious captivity and led in triumph with himself into the kingdom of Heaven. It was with this glorious train that Jesus Christ ascended, according to these words of St. Paul, Eph. c. iv. v. 8. where he says, *Christ ascending on high, has led captivity captive*; opening for them the gates of Heaven, which had been shut against mankind ever since the fall of Adam till that happy day. O with what raptures of joy, cries out St. Jerom, did all the angelical powers come forth to meet and welcome the son of God, on the day of his glorious entry into the holy city of Heavenly Jerusalem! The Angels were surprised, the Archangels were astonished to behold our human nature, exalted thus by him above the choirs of Heaven; the Cherubim and Seraphim were in extasies, to see their King, after gaining a complete victory over hell, sin and death, taking possession of the realms of everlasting bliss, in an immortal, impassible and glorified body, that outshone the brightness of

a thousand suns. The disciples, in the mean time, standing on Mount Olivet, with their eyes fixed on the cloud which had taken their dear Lord and Master out of their sight, two Angels in a human shape, and clothed in white apparel, appeared to them and said, *Omen of Galilee*, for they were natives of that country, *why stand ye gazing up to Heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from ye into Heaven, so shall he come as ye have seen him going up into Heaven; he shall come again at the end of the world in the clouds of Heaven with great power and majesty, preceded by legions of Angels; he shall come then, not as he did in the adorable mystery of the incarnation, but in quality of sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, in order to invite his elect to the inheritance of his heavenly kingdom, and to banish all reprobate and impenitent sinners into hell's unquenchable flames.*

The Evangelist tells us, that he is at present *seated at the right hand of God the Father*; not that we are to imagine that God the Father has either a right or a left hand; for, as God is in himself an incorporeal being, and a pure spirit, he cannot be supposed to have either hands or feet, so that this is a figurative expression, accommodated to our understanding and manner of speaking. By it is only meant, that Jesus Christ, as God, is equal in power and majesty to God the Father, and as man is now exalted above all creatures, to the highest place and to the supreme happiness that his sacred humanity can be raised to in Heaven. In like manner, the word *sitteth*, which is made use of by the Evangelist in the Gospel of this day, and by the Apostles in their Creed, does not denote any particular situation, attitude or posture of our Saviour's body in Heaven, but signifies that his humanity now enjoys a perfect repose, and is in full possession of the glory of his eternal Father, without being any longer subject, as he was here on earth, to hardships, pains, and sufferings, or liable to the vicissitudes and infirmities of human nature.

However, this repose which he now enjoys in Heaven, does not hinder him from attending to the wants and miseries of poor mortals here on earth, and representing the merits of his passion and death to his eternal Father in our behalf. Elevated as he is, above the nine choirs of Angels, he still watches, like a good Shepherd, over his flock, and takes special care of his beloved spouse, the Holy Catholic Church. He incessantly presides over her as her supreme Head, and supplies her with a regular succession of visible Pastors, Bishops and Teachers whom he guides, assists and animates with his holy Spirit, to rule and govern her, that, as St. Paul speaks, Eph. c. iv. v. 11. *We may all meet in the unity of faith, and not be tossed to and fro, or carried about with every blast of new-fangled doctrines.* In short, he continues without interruption to provide for the necessities of his Church, and to fulfil his promise of abiding with her every day until the end of the world, not

only after a spiritual manner by his grace and protection, but verily and indeed, by a real and substantial presence of his precious body and blood, in the blessed Sacrament of the Altar. In and by this holy sacrament, and by the other sacraments which he vouchsafed to leave us as so many standing monuments and pledges of his boundless love, the graces of God are communicated to us, and the merits of his passion are daily applied to our souls, according to these words of the Apostle, Ephes. c. iv. v. 7. *Grace is given to every one of us, according to the measure of the donation of Christ.*

The mystery of his ascension was prefigured in the old Law, by the High Priest entering into the sanctuary once a year, as a mediator between God and his people, and carrying in his hands the blood of the victims that were immolated for them; for, in like manner Jesus Christ entered into the sanctuary of Heaven on the day of his ascension as our Mediator, our High Priest and Advocate with his eternal Father, to offer to him the precious blood which he shed on the altar of the cross for our redemption, and to demand pardon and plead mercy for us with all the powerful eloquence of his five sacred wounds, the marks of which he was pleased to retain in his hands, his feet and his side. This made St. Paul say, Heb. c. iv. *Since my brethren, we have an High Priest who penetrated the Heavens, and who can always save such as have recourse to God through him, let us go with confidence to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy.* In like manner, St. John says, 1 Ep. c. ii. *My little children, these things I write to you, that ye may not sin; but if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.* Behold what signal advantages we derive from his ascension! He prays for us in Heaven, as our High Priest, says St. Augustine; he prays in us there as our Head, and he is there prayed to by us as our God. It is through him, says St. Paul, that we have access to the Father, and it is through him that all favours and blessings descend to us. He ascended into Heaven in order to prepare a place there for us, as he speaks, Jo. xiv. and in our name to take possession of those sacred mansions of bliss which he purchased for us at the expense of his life. By withdrawing his visible presence thus from us, he likewise designed to exercise our faith, to corroborate our hope and to perfect our charity. In the first place, our faith is exercised and rendered more meritorious, by believing in him although we do not see him; for the virtue of faith has for its object things that appear not, or are not seen; and the Gospel pronounces those *blessed, who believe what they do not see.* Our hope is also corroborated thereby; for, since the sacred humanity of our Saviour has ascended into Heaven, we have just reason to hope, that where our supreme Head is gone before us, we, who are his members, shall likewise ascend one day, in order to be

united to him for ever. Hence he says, Jo. c. xvii. v. 24. *Father, I will that where I am, there also they may be whom thou hast given me, that they may see my glory.* Our charity is likewise increased and perfected by his ascension; because our hearts are thereby detached from the earth, raised above the world, and drawn after our Blessed Redeemer into the kingdom of Heaven, it being just that where our treasure, our God and our all is, there also our hearts should be, as the Gospel says, Matt. c. vi. v. 21. Had he remained visible amongst us here below, we would be apt to consider him only as man, and to love him with a kind of earthly affection; our thoughts would be fixed on the contemplation of his humanity, like the disciples, who, whilst he conversed visibly with them on earth, seemed to judge of him almost after a human manner; wherefore he told them, Jo. c. xvi. v. 7. *that it was expedient for them that he should go from them,* as their hearts required to be weaned from earthly affections, and as that imperfect love with which they loved him required to be purified and perfected by divine love at the coming of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Before the ascension of Christ the disciples were strongly attached to things of the world, and erroneously imagined that he was to deliver the people of Israel from the yoke of the Roman empire, and to restore their commonwealth to its ancient splendor, as appears from these words which the two disciples said to him after his resurrection, when he appeared to them on their way to the castle of Emmaus, *we were in hopes,* said they, *that Jesus would deliver Israel;* for the carnal Jews, being accustomed to expound the Oracles of the Prophets, not in a spiritual but in a literal sense, of a temporal kingdom, it was a common opinion amongst them, that the Messiah was to subdue all the enemies of their nation by the force of arms, and that he was to reign here on earth as a most opulent and most powerful Monarch. Hence came the ambitious request of the children of Zebedæus, who wanted to be ranked, the one at the right hand, the other on the left hand of Christ in his kingdom. It was the same mistaken notion, that made the disciples ask our Saviour *at what time he would restore the kingdom of Israel?* The same error was afterwards revived by Papias, the disciple of St. John the Evangelist; it was also supported by the Millenarian heretics, and justly condemned by the Church in the days of St. Damasus, as being contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and to the doctrine of Christ himself, who, by his words and actions openly declared that his *kingdom was not of this world.*

His ascension alone was sufficient to evidence this truth; for, by quitting the earth he gave us clearly to understand that, as St. Paul speaks, Heb. xi. *We have no permanent city here below, but we are to seek after a future one;* that we are created for the enjoyment of a better life, and ought to look upon ourselves as sojourners and travellers here on earth; that Heaven

is our native country and happy home, and ought to be the grand object of our desires, the centre of our wishes, and the chief end of all our pursuits. Such were the sentiments that actuated the disciples after the ascension of Christ; convinced thereby of the emptiness of all transitory enjoyments, and of the vanity of all sublunary things, they regarded the world as a place of banishment, as a vale of tears, as a dangerous and sinful Babylon, and as a tempestuous ocean full of rocks and quicksands. They considered themselves as exiles, as travellers, as pilgrims from the Lord, as St. Paul expresses it, 2 Cor. v. Returning, therefore, from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem, immediately after the ascension of the Lord, they retired from the noise and tumults of the world, and raised their affections to the real and permanent goods of a future state; they followed their Divine Master into Heaven with their hearts, and longed for the happy moment that was to unite them entirely to him, and to put them in possession of his eternal kingdom; they applied themselves unanimously to fervent prayer, and to the contemplation of heavenly things, in order to dispose their souls the better for receiving the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

Behold, my brethren, the salutary effects which the ascension of our Lord wrought in their hearts, and which it should likewise work in our hearts. We should endeavour to imitate the disciples herein, and ascend like them in spirit after Jesus Christ into Heaven. We should follow him with the most ardent desires of our hearts, that, as St. Augustine says, Serm. 175. we may have the happiness to follow him hereafter in reality with our souls and bodies. We should divest ourselves of all inordinate attachment to the perishable enjoyment of this transitory life, and look down with a generous disdain and contempt on its painted toys, empty bubbles, and deceitful allurements. We should, according to the advice of the Apostle, *relish the things that are above, and not the things that are here on earth.* Far from following the example of the children of Israel, who were so strangely infatuated during their captivity in Babylon, that they fell in love with their chains and grew fond of their bondage, we should look up to Heaven where Jesus Christ our treasure is, and aspire to that real happiness and endless bliss which he has in store for his faithful servants. *Seek, says St. Paul, Coloss. iii. the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, in the splendid company of millions of Angels and Saints.* The Jews, indeed, might be deemed somewhat excusable in their earthly pursuits, and in seeking the perishable things of the world, because Heaven was not yet open to them, and because the Old Testament held out temporal blessings and promised worldly rewards to them, as an encouragement to make them observe the laws and ordinances of God; but Christians can plead no excuse under the new Law of the Gospel, since

Christ has thrown open the gates of Heaven to them, and holds out a never fading Crown of Glory to reward his followers and faithful servants, after the toils and labours of this mortal life.

We read in the Book of Genesis, that when Jacob understood that his dearly-beloved son was exalted to the highest rank of honour and dignity in the kingdom of Egypt, he conceived the most ardent desire to see and embrace him, and for this purpose undertook a long and painful journey. Should not, my brethren, our hearts be fired with a similar desire of seeing and embracing our dear Redeemer, now exalted to the highest degree of glory, above all the angelic choirs in the kingdom of Heaven? Should we not, for this end, cheerfully encounter and zealously surmount every difficulty, every obstacle that stands in our way? Should we not long for the happy day that is to rescue us from the miseries of this sinful life, and bless us with the sight of his amiable face? He has marked out to us the course we are to take in order to arrive at this happiness; he has taught us both by his word and example, the virtues which we are to practice in order to be entitled to the possession of that eternal kingdom, to which he most lovingly invites us. If we sincerely wish to ascend after him, we must follow his footsteps, and bear in ourselves some resemblance of the virtues of his holy life. We must humble ourselves with him here on earth, if we expect to be exalted with him hereafter, since *he alone who humbles himself shall be exalted*. We must wash away the foul stains of our sins with the salutary waters of penance, since *nothing that is defiled will be admitted into the holy city of heavenly Jerusalem*. Drunkards, lechers, extortioners, cursers, swearers and blasphemers, are to be eternally excluded from it, according to the express words of the Apostle. Neither pride, nor covetousness, nor any other vice of ours, as St. Augustine speaks, will get admission there, or be suffered to ascend after our heavenly Physician.

O Divine Jesus, give us grace to remove every obstacle that might disqualify us from partaking of the happy fruits of thy redemption. Grant that we may have our affections constantly fixed on thee by a lively faith, a firm hope, and an ardent charity. And as thou wert pleased to lift up thy sacred hands on Mount Olivet, and bless thy disciples before thy ascension, so vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to lift up thy hands of mercy and to pour forth thy blessings on thy servants assembled here this day in thy name. Be thou our safeguard and Almighty Protector, amidst the many dangers to which we are constantly exposed in this sinful Babylon. Defend us against all the efforts and wiles of Satan, and conduct our souls, under the wings of thy mercy, to that heavenly kingdom which thou hast purchased for us by the effusion of thy sacred blood. And which, my brethren, I heartily wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*.

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE ASCENSION.

On the importance of Salvation.

Quid prodest Homini, si mundum Universum lucretur, anima vero non detrimentum patiatur?

Mat. c. xvi. v. 26.

What doth it avail a Man, if he gain the whole World, and incur the loss of his Soul?

Mat. c. xvi. v. 26.

TO see men so industrious, so occupied, so active and vigilant in their worldly pursuits, one might say that they seem to labour for an endless series of years, and for treasures, the possession of which could insure for them a true and permanent felicity; for can it be supposed that so much care, so much bustle, so much agitation and anxiety, are only designed for the acquisition of a fortune, the duration of which can scarce equal the duration of the pains which are taken to acquire it, and that a life so rapid should be passed away in seeking with so much fatigue those perishable goods, which must be abandoned at the hour of death; and yet this mistake, which appears so palpable, is become the error of the greatest part of mankind; temporal views influence almost all their actions; the perishable treasures of fortune, which are often possessed with no less disquiet of mind than they are acquired with anxiety, captivate their hearts, command their whole attention, and furnish their lives with ample matter of care and speculation. But should not religion furnish us with sentiments more noble, more sublime? Does it not propose to us an eternity of bliss, as an object more worthy of our care and attention? Does it not unmask the imposture of all transitory allurements, and lay open the vanity of all terrene objects? Does it not tell us, that what is fleeting deserves not our esteem? And that though we arrive at the highest degree of happiness here on earth, we are then perhaps at the eve of our death, and at the very gates of eternity? Why then do we confine our thoughts so much within this world, and make so small a provision for the world to come? Does not common prudence teach us, that what is our greatest interest is what we should

have most at heart, and that the affair of salvation, well managed, is what will redound most to our advantage? This affair, therefore, should chiefly engage our attention, and yet of all affairs it is what is most overlooked by the generality of Christians. To dissuade you from this deplorable mistake and culpable neglect, is the design of the following discourse. It is to persuade you to prefer salvation to all other affairs, because it is of all other affairs the most important, nay, of all affairs it is your *only* affair. Of all affairs it is the most important; this shall be the first point. Of all affairs it is your only affair; this shall be the second point, and the whole subject of your favourable attention. Let us implore the light of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, &c. *Ave Maria.*

The whole life of the greatest part of mankind passes away in the pursuit of the transitory goods of this world, without thinking seriously on eternity, or attending properly to the grand affair of salvation. In vain does religion call us to more solid cares, and to more serious occupations; in vain does experience teach us, that to amass the perishable goods of fortune is but like amassing a great heap of sand, which the first shock scatters, and which decreases in proportion as we endeavour to add to it; in vain does the Almighty himself assure us, that the day of our greatest elevation is but the eve of our fall. The cares of temporal affairs, in spite of religion and all its maxims, are the most serious occupations of the life of man. It is only for the concerns of the soul that we are idle and inactive; we are careful, assiduous and vigilant for all the rest. Nothing discourages us in the pursuit of our worldly interest; perils, fatigues, perplexities, labours, hazards, the intrigues of rivals, nothing, in fine, can stop, nothing can shake our resolution; but when we are to labour for the salvation of the soul, and contend for a happy eternity, alas! we are feeble, cold and indifferent, though there is nothing that we should undertake with greater ardour, since, of all affairs, the affair of salvation is the most important? Because it is such, that if it alone succeeds, though we should fail of success in every other affair, we shall be completely happy; and if it alone should miscarry, though we should be fortunate in all the rest, we shall be entirely and eternally unhappy. Hence Christ our Lord says in the Gospel, *What does it avail a man to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul?* Matt. c. xvi. v. 26.

To save your souls, my brethren, is the capital point for you; as for the rest, though you should be reduced to the lowest condition, though you should live here in sufferings, in misery and contempt, though you should be stripped of all your worldly possessions, though you should be without succours, without friends, accused, condemned and persecuted as the scorn and outcast of men, all this is nothing if you

arrive at length at the happy term of salvation, because you will then find a glory that will amply indemnify you for all the disgraces of the world, a glory infinite, a glory immortal, a glory without end. You will then find a treasure which will amply indemnify you for all the miseries of the world, for you will possess God himself, who will be your treasure, an inexhaustible treasure in the kingdom of Heaven. In short, you will then find a repose that will amply indemnify you for all the labours and sufferings you endure in the world, for you will enjoy a complete and consummate happiness without end, without interruption, without the least solicitude, the least trouble, the least molestation. But if you lose your souls, how deplorable will your condition be? Consult yourselves on this head, consult reason, consult religion, consult your own conscience on this important affair. Ask the rich man mentioned in the Gospel, who at the sad moment of his death was buried in the flames of hell, what did all the false happiness of the world avail him, when it was followed by everlasting misery? Learn true wisdom at the expense of so many other reproaches, who are now condemned to eternal torments; they can well instruct you, as they are fully convinced of their folly by their own woful experience. Hear how they lament their unhappy lot; hear how they bewail and regret their misfortune in chap. v. of the Book of Wisdom: We have lived in the world in credit and splendor, in abundance and in pleasures; but, O perishable riches, O seducing pleasures, which we eagerly sought for, in order to content our sensual appetites, what do you now avail us? Will you serve to mollify the pains we suffer, or to moderate the heat of those scorching flames which now surround, burn and devour us? Heretofore we treated as folly the piety and devotion of those faithful servants of God, who laboured to insure for themselves a happy eternity; we looked on them as weak, timorous, scrupulous and superstitious souls. Fools that we were, we mocked, despised and ridiculed them; but death has justified them and confounded us; it has opened our eyes and made us see our mistake; a vain shew of worldly happiness has deceived and seduced us; we have strayed from the ways of truth, and we have lost our God for ever without resource. It is thus that the damned souls will for ever lament their deplorable condition, and unprofitably regret their loss of salvation. Let their misery and distress be a warning to you, my brethren, and teach you to be more solicitous in future than you are in providing for the welfare of your immortal souls; for what will it avail you to have been great, rich, wise, learned and renowned in the world, if you are to be despicable, poor and miserable in hell for a whole eternity? Ah! you will say one day, what is become of those projects of ambition, those parties of debauchery, those assemblies of libertinism, those diversions, those joys and delights, which I had more at heart than my

salvation? They have all passed away like a shadow, but the sins of which they have been the occasion have not passed away; they still have a being, they are not as yet effaced in the book of Divine Justice, nay, perhaps they will remain always there, to draw down the heaviest vengeance that a just God can discharge on a criminal soul.

What charm then binds you, my brethren? What enchantment seduces you? You are wise and circumspect in every thing else, and it seems that you are stupid and insensible only in the affair of your salvation; you are attached to every other object, according as you are led by ambition, by interest, by curiosity, or by any other passion, and you scarce give a moment to the affair of eternity, and this affair which is of all the most considerable, is to you notwithstanding of all the most indifferent. You are passionately fond of things which are either hurtful or unprofitable to you, and you interest yourselves but little for what is of infinite consequence to you, and for what you should be perpetually in action, perpetually in motion, perpetually in alarms. God has given you your whole life to labour for the salvation of your soul; he has judged that such a space of time was necessary to succeed in it, and you are pleased to judge otherwise; for you pretend to be saved, though you scarce allow yourselves a few moments to be employed in the business of salvation. Thus you risk an infinite series of inexpressible bliss, and with tranquillity you expose yourselves to an endless series of unspeakable misery. You know that time is short, that life is uncertain, that death approaches, and that each moment may be your last; and if this were your last moment, and you were cut off the face of the earth in the state of mortal sin unrepented, your eternal ruin would be inevitable. You have often made this terrifying reflection; you have been reminded hereof a hundred times, and though you are now perhaps near the end of your career, yet the affair of your salvation is not the more advanced.

Ah Christians! is it not high time to be roused from the fatal insensibility which leads you on to endless ruin? Is it not high time to exert yourselves strenuously in a business of such importance? Remember that there is question of possessing or of losing God, of enjoying eternal happiness, or of being condemned to torments dreadful in rigour and eternal in duration! Can we have any interest comparable to this? Had not Solomon reason to say, that though man should live for many ages, and during that space of time should enjoy an uninterrupted series of prosperity, abounding in all the advantages of the most plentiful fortune, without the least pain, anxiety or disquiet of mind, still in the midst of all this worldly happiness he ought never to lose sight of the days of eternity, which when once arrived, will make him clearly see the vanity and nothingness of all earthly enjoyments and delights; it is then he will clearly perceive how unprofitably he spent his time; it is then he

will be convinced that all his indefatigable labours in the management of his worldly concerns resembled only the occupation of the spider, that exhausts itself to make these slender cobwebs which serve only to ensnare little flies.

The Son of God tells you, and his ministers often repeat it, that it would avail you nothing to have made a conquest of the whole universe, if after all you come to lose your soul. All other losses are nothing in comparison of the loss of salvation; all other losses can only deprive you of those goods of which you must be stript in a short time, as soon as death closes your eyes. Other losses may be repaired and remedied, but the loss of salvation is irreparable and without resource. If you die in a bad state, you will be condemned to eternal torments without remedy; if you once unhappily fall into hell-fire, you will burn eternally in flames, for out of hell there is no redemption. Whoever is once damned, is damned for all eternity, without the least hope of relief or abatement in his pains. Is it not then the height of insensibility and blindness to neglect our salvation, to hazard an eternity of happiness, and make ourselves liable to an eternity of misery, for the vain, fleeting and deceitful satisfactions of this life, which vanish and disappear like a shadow? Instead of losing our souls for things so trifling, and for advantages of so short a duration, the very enjoyment of which is mixed with much gall and bitterness, we should rather renounce every thing in this world than neglect the main chance, or lose sight of the grand affair of salvation, which of all affairs is the most important, nay of all affairs it is to be considered as the only affair, as I promised to shew you in the second point.

That salvation is our only affair, that is, the only affair that deserves our constant care and application, is a truth frequently repeated in Holy Writ; it is recommended to us by our Divine Redeemer, as *the only one necessary thing* that should engage our whole attention; it is it only that can properly be called our own affair; our other concerns regard those who are to benefit by us, or to inherit the fruits of our industry, but this entirely regards ourselves. Our other affairs may be useful, and may bring in some advantage and profit, but this is an affair of absolute and indispensable necessity; it is an affair of such moment and importance, that how fortunate soever we may be otherwise in all our enterprizes, we not only gain nothing, but our All is lost for ever if we succeed not herein. This is the affair with which God has charged every one of us in particular. It was not necessary that we should be created; the world was long without us, and would have still subsisted though we never had been in a state of existence; but as it pleased the Almighty to give us a being, so he could not but ordain us for some end, and for what end more glorious than to serve him here on earth, and to enjoy him eternally in Heaven hereafter? All your actions, then, my brethren, should be per-

formed with this view and directed to this end; this is the business which should occupy you morning, noon and night; this is an employment proper for all hours. In whatever state or condition you are, says St. Ambrose, be always attentive to the salvation of your soul, and take care to insure for yourself eternal happiness. Be not too solicitous about amassing the perishable riches of this transitory world; be not embarrassed with a multiplicity of affairs, which, properly speaking, deserve not your attention; at least, let not too much anxiety disquiet your mind, provided your salvation be in a prosperous way. Endeavour each day, says St. Paul, to make a progress in virtue; pay every attention to your immortal soul, that precious talent which God has committed to your care, that valuable treasure which Christ has purchased with his sacred blood; that part of you, the most valuable, the most noble, and consequently the most worthy of all your care and attention; spare no pains to preserve and save it; abandon the rest to Providence. This is a personal affair for you; in a word, it is your only affair, it is your only business in this world. Must all other affairs be therefore abandoned and neglected? No, my brethren, but they must be all referred to the great and important affair of your salvation. This must be the centre of all your actions, the end of all your pursuits, and the ruling principle that should influence you in all your undertakings; so that when I say your salvation is your only affair, I do not pretend that you are to neglect your temporal concerns, the welfare of your family, or the fruits of your industry; this would be to destroy all that Christian prudence, industry and economy, which both religion and reason do recommend; but what I affirm is, that in the management of your worldly affairs you are to have your salvation always in view, to aim at it in all your pursuits, and to make it your only principal affair and chief study. All Christians, from the King to the beggar, are to discharge the duties of their respective stations with this view, and with an intention of pleasing God, and of being subservient to the designs of his Divine Providence. The merchant, the dealer, is to employ himself in trade and commerce, in order to execute the will and conform to the designs of the Almighty, who placed him in that state and condition of life. Fathers and mothers are to labour in their domestic concerns, through a motive of following the vocation of Heaven, and obeying the orders of Providence, which designed the labours, cares and duties of their state as the means of their sanctification. The same may be said with regard to each different condition of life. It may be applied to the man of business in the midst of his worldly occupations, and to the ecclesiastic in the performance of the sacred functions of his ministry.

This plainly shews the extreme folly of sinners, who ruin and damn themselves in these very circumstances to which God has attached their salvation; for what is there which may not be made conducive to this end, by being duly referred to God

and sanctified by a religious motive. Poverty and riches, adversity and prosperity, depression and elevation, sickness and health, may all contribute to accomplish the important business of salvation, by being made proper use of. Are you poor and destitute of the goods of fortune? Hear what the Saviour of the world says in the Gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they who are not only poor in effect, but poor in spirit and in affection; blessed are the poor who are christianly submissive in their poverty, and content in that low state wherein God has placed them; blessed are the poor, who support with patience their urging necessities and pressing wants, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* Are you rich, my brethren? Employ part of what you possess to make to yourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity, that they may procure you one day admittance into the eternal tabernacles of glory. Assist the miserable, relieve the distressed, who in cellars and garrets languish under the weight of sickness and the pressures of indigence, and you shall hear on the day of judgment this comfortable sentence, which will rank you amongst the elect, *Come ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom of Heaven; I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; naked, and ye clothed me; since whatever ye do to my little ones, I look upon it as done to myself in person.* Are you in adversity, my brethren? It only depends on you to sanctify it by your patience; and adversity, thus sanctified, is a sure pledge of eternal happiness; for as St. Paul says, *Our momentary and light tribulation, worketh in us above measure an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* Are you in health? You are the better able to undergo the more painful exercises of religion, of piety, of mortification and penance. Are you weak and infirm? Bear with resignation your weakness and infirmities. In fine, whatever is your state, situation or condition, all may be of advantage to your eternal welfare, and contribute to the salvation of your souls, if you refer all your thoughts, words, actions and designs to this great and glorious end.

And really, my brethren, what is more necessary than that the affair of your salvation should thus engage your whole attention, and be made the end of all your pursuits? Yet you must acknowledge, that of all affairs this is what you seem most to neglect, and to have least at heart. What part of your life have you employed in this important business? How many years have you consecrated thereto? How many days? How many hours? I cannot think you would presume to count upon those odd half hours you pass in the Chapel, whilst you assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. You know how frequently you are distracted, and how little the affair of your salvation engages your attention even at that juncture. Things altogether profane are often the subject of your thoughts; your traffic, your domestic concerns, your diversions, and a thousand wandering ideas accompany you to the very foot of the altar, and occupy a great part of the time. What reason

can you assign for this unchristian conduct, if it be not this, that you do not consider your salvation as your most important and your only affair? If you are threatened with an expensive lawsuit, if a considerable temporal advantage is at stake, if you are seized with a fit of sickness, you are occupied both day and night with the thoughts of your lawsuit, with solicitude for your worldly interest, with the care of preventing the fatal consequences of your sickness; but, alas! when your eternal interest is at stake, when your souls are dangerously ill, when they are mortally wounded and all covered with the dismal leprosy of sin, when they are all disfigured and stripped of grace, when they are under the sentence of damnation, and nothing but the slender thread of life to suspend the execution of it; in a word, when all that is terrible is to be feared, you then are unmoved and unconcerned. O deplorable infatuation! If common prudence requires, that every necessary precaution should be taken to avert temporal misfortunes and preserve the perishable life of the body, what should be done to escape endless misery, and insure life everlasting? Should not all that is charming, all that is agreeable to our inclinations, be abandoned if necessary for this end? The merchant and the mariner, who in a violent storm find themselves under the necessity and sad alternative, either of perishing or casting into the sea all their valuable merchandise, do not deliberate long about the choice they are to make. Though it is all the fruit of a long voyage and of numerous fatigues; though it is all the hopes of their family; though they see themselves upon the brink of being reduced to the lowest ebb of misery, they resolve immediately on throwing overboard and losing all the goods they have in the world, because they are persuaded that otherwise they must inevitably lose their life. Under these circumstances, and in this persuasion, they abandon the cargo of their ship without pain, or at least without hesitation. Should not their example influence your future conduct, my brethren, and persuade you to labour strenuously from the present moment for the salvation of your souls, cost what it will. There is nothing so precious, nothing so charming, nothing so dear to you in this world, but you should be determined to lose and abandon, rather than abandon the Lord your God and lose your soul. There is nothing so difficult but you should be ready to undertake, nothing so painful but you should be willing to suffer, if necessary, to insure for yourselves a happy eternity.

O Almighty and Eternal God, preserve us from fixing our hearts and affections upon the false goods and empty enjoyments of this transitory life. Give us grace to consider always the eternal salvation of our souls as the most important of all our affairs, and to make it our constant study to seek thy heavenly kingdom before all things. Grant us a lively faith, a firm hope, and an active charity, that will animate us to labour with zeal and perseverance in thy service during the time of

our sojourn here on earth, as by this means we may, at our dying hour, look with a well-grounded hope for that never-fading Crown of Glory, which thou hast promised to thy faithful servants. And which I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

FOURTH DAY OF MAY.

On the Festival of St. Monica.

Os suum aperuit sapientiæ, et lex clementiæ in lingua ejus; consideravit semitas domus suæ.

Prov. c. xxxi. v. 26, 27.

She opened her mouth unto wisdom; she had the law of clemency on her tongue, and she was attentive to the care of her family.

Prov. c. xxxi. v. 26, 27.

THE solemnity of this day offers to our view the life of the illustrious Monica, whom God, in the profusion of his mercy, was pleased to give to the world in the year 332, as a complete and finished model of Christian perfection, and a compound of all the good qualities of her sex. The superior excellency and prevailing brightness of her virtues made her the wonder of the age she lived in, and the subject of panegyric to the end of time; for, as it was impossible, according to St. Ambrose, that the son of such tears as her's should perish, so it is impossible that the mother of such a son should ever be forgotten. Returning ages shall set forth her praise, and transmit the luminous rays of her virtues to posterity, since, as the Scripture says, *the woman who fears the Lord shall be praised*, *Prov. c. iii. v. 30.* In her we behold what Solomon wished so ardently to find; in her we see his nicest description of a virtuous woman answered, and the most minute circumstance he paints exactly fulfilled; for her hands were always employed in doing good, and she never failed in her duty towards God, her neighbour, and her family, nor opened her mouth but to pronounce words which flowed from wisdom; the law of clemency and meekness dwelt on her tongue, and she acquitted herself of all the offices of a virgin, a wife, a mother and a widow, with such fidelity and perfection, that I may justly propose her as a bright mirror and shining example for Christians of all states and conditions. By her invincible patience and indefatigable zeal, she conquered the disorders of her domestics, gained their love and confidence, sanctified their souls, and made them the chief instruments of her glory. By her heroic virtues and edifying

life, she completed the conversion of the most obstinate of Pagans and of the most turbulent of husbands. In short, she performed all the obligations of a Christian wife, and left a noble example for all married women to imitate. It is the subject of my first point. She instilled religion and piety into the tender plants she brought forth for Jesus Christ, and suppressed their growing vices, so as to fulfil all the duties of a Christian mother, and to become a perfect model for all parents to copy after. It is the subject of the second point. Let us previously invoke the divine assistance, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, greeting her with the Angel, *Ave Maria*.

The great Augustine, the child of Monica's heart, and the fruitful product of her tears, has described her virtues in the ninth Book of his Confessions, with all his stock of learning and his floods of eloquence; and the glory of having given this bright luminary and unshaken pillar to God's Church, is the most solid honour that can be attributed to her, and finishes in miniature the most complete eulogium. Leaving her, therefore, in possession of her unequalled glory, I shall content myself with laying a sketch of her actions before you, not to aggrandize their merit, but to instruct you, and to point out the surest road for you to arrive at the perfection of your respective states. Represent then to yourselves a young, tender virgin, brought up with care in the love and service of Jesus Christ, educated in all the virtues that render the state of virginity so holy and amiable, so excellent and perfect, full of that piety which she had imbibed with the suck of her mother, entirely devoted to her Creator, quite a stranger to the vanities and dissipations of a sinful world, and admired no less for her meekness and modesty, than for her profound humility and chaste retirement. Such was the character of Monica before she was delivered by her parents in marriage. No idle amusements disturbed her mind or possessed her heart; she was guarded against all the soothing words of deluding flattery, whereby so many unwary and innocent souls in this age are ensnared and unhappily decoyed, to make a shipwreck of their virtue and baptismal sanctity. Far from seeking to attract the eyes of men by pompous and taudry dresses, more becoming the votaries of Venus than the disciples of Jesus Christ, her only study was to possess the inward ornaments of the mind, and to enrich her immortal soul with the treasures of divine grace. Far from spending her precious time at a toilet or a card table, or in reading novels, romances and play-books, which are so apt to poison the ideas and corrupt the hearts and minds of young persons, she was constantly employed either in the performance of her filial duties, or in the contemplation of heavenly things, blessing, praising, and adoring her Creator, and consecrating her heart to him as a pure holocaust and victim of divine love.

In these happy exercises of piety and religion, of innocence and purity, Monica spent her tender years, till divine Providence was pleased to dispose otherwise of her, and until she was prompted by obedience and inclination to change her condition, and to enter into the bonds of holy wedlock. The greater part of those who now-a-days engage in this state, make it a kind of negotiation and mercenary traffic, and consider only the profits, conveniencies and pleasures that result from it; they commonly embark on this voyage for life without knowing the road which they are to take, or the course which they are to steer; they contract an alliance which is only to be dissolved by death, without consulting the will of the Almighty, without the proper motives, without the advice of their friends, or the consent, approbation and blessing of their parents. They seldom reflect on the weighty obligations that are annexed to the state of marriage, and provided there be a prospect of some worldly interest, they inquire no farther; for which reason it frequently happens that the nuptial knot is no sooner tied than they wish it broken, deploring a thousand times their hard destiny, and lamenting, when it is too late, the cruel slavery to which they are reduced.

Monica was endowed with too much prudence and religion, to run hand over head in this giddy, unthinking and unchristian manner; whatever she did was in reference to the honour and glory of God, and the sanctification of her soul; her intentions were pure, holy, and conformable to the great designs for which matrimony was instituted and ordained by the Almighty. She paid a due respect to her parents, and with their advice and by the permission of Heaven, she married Patricius, a nobleman of Tagaste in Afric, but an obstinate Pagan, naturally boisterous, violent and furious, and of so fiery, passionate and hasty a temper, that he knew no bounds when contradicted in the least. The amazing contrast served only to add fresh lustre to the splendor of our saint's shining virtues, and gave her a large field to reap the richest palms of Christian patience. Considering the state of matrimony as intended by divine Providence for her salvation, she turned all her thoughts on the duties of her new profession, and formed the generous, the truly exalted resolution, to observe in the most minute circumstance whatever St. Paul had said on this subject, relative to the duties of married women, and to conquer, by the assistance of divine grace, every difficulty that should oppose itself to her pious intentions.

Scarce any woman was exposed to so many crosses and vexations; almost every hour in the day presented her with new trials, and fresh opportunities to exercise the heroism of Christianity; her patience was tried in the most delicate point; she saw unlawful flames kindled in a heart which she alone could lay claim to; yet, wonderful to be said, here she conquered even herself, and thought worse of the offence given to

God, than of the injury done to her own person by so base an infidelity. Monica was convinced, by the principles of her religion, that no ill treatment could exempt her from the obedience, submission and fidelity she owed her husband; she knew that the obedient, submissive and faithful woman is often the instrument that God makes use of to convert the unbelieving man, and that patience, resignation, and an humble confidence in the divine mercy, are the surest means to complete so great a work; she was sensible that a silent example and an easy unrepining behaviour, are more persuasive than the severity of lectures and admonitions, and that an hasty obstinate man has too much pride to receive tamely an open reproof. Hence Monica never thwarted her husband by the least word or action, whilst she saw him in anger; but when the fit was over and he was calm, she mildly gave him her reasons and an account of her actions; she drew him insensibly to reflect on his duty by the unstudied graces of her actions, and by the pleasing accents of her tongue. The sweetness and good humour which always sat upon her face, and diffused itself into every word and action, made him a tacit reproach for his abuses, and he stood confounded and corrected by her virtue. Every thing that had the least tendency towards keeping up a dispute, or abating his affection, she considered as a matter of importance, and she waited for a more favourable opportunity to make him sensible of his mistake, when it was necessary. The chief argument she made use of for this end was the sanctity of her conduct, enforced by an obliging affectionate behaviour, and a greater obsequiousness, whereby she not only commanded his love, respect and esteem, but also managed the sallies of his passions with such ingenuity and good sense, that, notwithstanding his hasty and choleric temper, it was never known that he ever struck her, or that they had entertained any domestic dissension, even for a single day. So great an ascendancy had she gained over him by her condescension, and by the sweet evenness of her temper! A behaviour like this preached to him the holiness of her religion more eloquently, than any discourses or arguments whatever, and contributed in a great measure to bring him over at length to the pale of the Catholic Church.

Such, my brethren, was Monica's method, such was the return she met with, and such was the advice she gave her female acquaintances, who were willing to live happy in the conjugal state; and as many as followed her advice and example in this respect towards their husbands, rejoiced in the experience of the comfort and advantages which accrued to them from their meekness, patience and complaisance, whilst those that did not follow it, but broke out into murmurs and complaints, bitter invectives, cutting expressions and provoking language, felt the whole weight of their husband's arms, bore the scandalous marks of their indignation, and found themselves

constantly in a kind of hell upon earth. And really, what else is the marriage state without peace and harmony, love and friendship? And how is it possible that love and esteem can be preserved long amidst frequent broils and disputes, reproaches and contradictions, scornful looks, ill humour and capriciousness? Will not the most tender affection be gradually changed into coldness and indifference, hatred and aversion, by the means of a thwarting, sour, peevish temper? Will not an ill-timed advice and an unseasonable rebuke, contribute rather to heighten the discord and widen the disunion? Will not a scolding tongue, that makes a mountain of what is but an atom, administer fuel to the blaze, and exasperate men sometimes to a degree of madness? If married women did but know what piety and religion, patience and meekness can do, and what powerful aids they are to render them happy and to sweeten the yoke of matrimony, they would copy after the illustrious Monica. When they have the misfortune to be paired with bad husbands, they would endeavour to turn necessity into a virtue, and carry their cross with Christian forbearance, rather than augment their misery by fretfulness and peevishness, and expose themselves to the danger of passing from one hell into another; from an hell of tribulation in this world into an hell of unspeakable torments in the next; in short, from the hell of matrimony into the real hell of the damned. Wives who sincerely wish to obtain from their husbands all the attention that is due to them, and to be mistresses as much as it is proper for them to be, should learn to be docile, mild, tractable and obedient, like Monica; they should bridle their tongues and subdue their passions; they should study to be agreeable and pleasing in every thing that is just and reasonable; they should endeavour to conquer the vicious or tyrannical temper of a bad husband, by mild and gentle means. By pursuing such a line of conduct, they would gradually win their husbands over to the government of reason, and assuredly induce them in the end to do their will; in short, they would find by experience, that the surest way to command a husband is to obey with a respectful submission and an edifying example. When their husbands happen to be devoid of faith and religion, let them, like Monica, speak to them of God by their actions and prudent conduct; let them daily put up their fervent prayers to Heaven for their conversion. It is thus that the faithful wife obtains the conversion of the unfaithful husband. It is by such means that Monica surmounted every difficulty, and triumphed in the end over a furious lion. It was thus that she drew her husband, Patricius, out of the labyrinths of vice, folly and idolatry, in which he wandered, and had the happiness to see him converted from all his errors; for, being charmed with the meekness, patience, and other sublime virtues of his spouse, he could no longer doubt of the truth of her religion; he embraced the Catholic faith and was baptized; he renounced

Satan and all his works ; he put on Jesus Christ and was entirely reformed ; he became chaste, humble and patient, sober, moderate and pious, during the remainder of his life. We have now considered Monica as a perfect model of Christian wives ; let us briefly consider her as a complete model of Christian mothers ; it is what I promised to shew you in the second point.

If we remount to the empoisoned spring of the numberless crimes, which, like a deluge overspread the face of the earth, we shall discover that they chiefly owe their birth to the bad education of children, and to the negligence and misconduct of parents. This is the fatal source of the many disorders, which, like original sin, are transmitted from father to son, from one generation to another. It was commanded in the Old Law, that every male child should be offered to God after the mother's purification. By this precept, the Lord was willing to oblige mankind to acknowledge their own dependence and his sovereign dominion, and at the same time to teach all parents, that they must devote their children to him from their tender years ; that they must instil piety into their breasts together with their nurses' milk, and persuade them, if possible, to the practice of virtue as soon as they are susceptible of instruction, it being a matter of the greatest consequence what ideas are stamped upon the ductile minds of children, what sentiments are impressed on their hearts, and to what habits they are first formed, since, if their mind once takes a wrong bent, it will be difficult to redress it. They should be inured early to little denials both in their will and senses ; their passions should be curbed whilst they are pliable ; the fire of divine love should be kindled in their hearts as soon as they are capable hereof, and they should be taught that pleasures which gratify the senses, must be guarded against, and used with great fear and moderation. These maxims were the plan of Monica's conduct ; she knew that the quality of a wife required her submission, and that the quality of a mother armed her with authority, and therefore, she studied to sanctify her husband by her invincible patience, and her children by her indefatigable zeal. No sooner did she become a widow, but in conformity with the dictates of St. Paul, she spent her days in retirement, tears, and the care of her children, especially of her son Augustine, whose vivacity of genius and inclination to vice, redoubled her fears ; wherefore, she watched all his actions from his very infancy, and never ceased by her instructions and good example, to convince him of his duty, and excite him to the love and service of Jesus Christ. Her first study was to consecrate him as a pure holocaust to God, to form his soul to virtue, to implant the seeds of piety in his heart, to inspire him with an abhorrence of sin, and to stifle in their birth whatever impressions the bad example of a Pagan father and of vicious companions, might stamp on him. O how much

reason is there to fear that many parents, for want of this religious care, will suffer in the other world for the crimes of their children as well as for their own? For what is more common than to bring up their children without any other principles of religion, than what are just sufficient to distinguish them from Jews and Pagans? Nay, how many parents are there, even within the precincts of this city, who lead such disorderly lives, that their houses resemble so many schools of the devil, and who give their unhappy children so many scandalous examples, that one would almost think that cursing, swearing, drunkenness, debauchery, and the like criminal practices, are the constant springs of marriage, and the only revenue or inheritance to be left to their posterity? How many are there, who labour like galley slaves to make a fortune for their children, and to instruct them in the polite arts of the age, but take little or no pains to make them good Christians, and fit them for the kingdom of Heaven? They are so solicitous to give them a fashionable education, that they often venture them in the midst of corruption to obtain it, as if they disregarded or forgot the great and noble end for which their children were created.

Nothing of this kind could be imputed to the virtuous Monica; above all things she studied the salvation of her children, and omitted nothing in her power to procure it. But, alas! in spite of all her endeavours, her young son Augustine fell into the most frightful gulph of vice in the sixteenth year of his age, partly by means of frequenting stage entertainments, and partly by reading lascivious play-books, which should be a warning to the unthinking youth of our days, who are so passionately fond of going to play-houses and of perusing amorous novels, comedies and stories of gallantry. O what a subject of grief was it for Monica, to behold the child of her heart thus straying away like the prodigal son, and feeding on the husks of swine, after she had taken so much pains to cultivate his mind with wholesome documents, and to balance the corrupt inclinations of his nature with sound principles of religion and morality! Each step Augustine takes out of the path of virtue is a second labour to her, and causes more exquisite pains than those which she had felt at her first bringing him into the world. Whilst Augustine sins, Monica weeps; whilst Augustine floats on a sea of empoisoned pleasures, Monica groans under a heavy weight of sadness and affliction; whilst Augustine plunges deeper and deeper into the mire, Monica bathes herself in scalding heart-breaking tears. In vain did Augustine forsake his native soil and cross the seas to shun her presence; Monica was continually before him as a guardian Angel; she traversed vast kingdoms and empires in order to reclaim him from his errors and bring him to a true understanding of his duty. Afric, Europe, Carthage, Rome and Milan, beheld her with wonder pursuing him with an heart

bleeding for the conversion of his soul ; she addressed herself to the eminent servants of God to assist her in her pious undertaking, and she poured out her heart daily before the altar of the Most High in fervent prayers and supplications. So great was the confidence she had in the goodness of her Creator, that she never once despaired but he would one day hear her prayers, receive her tears, and become propitious to her vows. This is what made her continue day and night striking at the gate of mercy with unwearied perseverance, and importuning Heaven by her tears and sighs to restore her son from the death of sin to the happy life of grace.

Learn from her example, O Christian parents, that it is a duty incumbent on ye to pray for your children. Be not content with promoting their temporal interest, but carry your views higher, and think on their eternal welfare. Give them a Christian education, set them a good example, and pray for them fervently and constantly. Should they not correspond with your care ; should they, like Augustine, go astray, be not disheartened ; renew your supplications, redouble your prayers ; the happy moment of grace will arrive ; the early impressions of virtue will recur one day, and open their eyes to see their folly and blush at their errors, and you may confide, like Monica, that you will have the consolation of seeing them return to the Lord their God sooner or later.

The conversion of Augustine cost Monica fifteen years of prayers and lamentations. It was then only that her tears were dried up, and her sorrow was changed into inexpressible joy. Floods of grace descended at length from Heaven, opened his eyes, and melted his heart into compunction. His errors vanished, his debauches were at an end ; and after a long night of obscurity he rose from the sea of his mother's tears like a sun all-glorious, to illumine the world by his brightness and to warm and inflame it with the ardour of his charity. It is easier to conceive than to express the raptures and extasies with which the affectionate soul of Monica was transported, on seeing the wonderful change that was wrought in her son Augustine, who, on his part began to look now upon her as doubly his mother, and considered himself indebted to her for the life of grace as well as for the life of nature.

In fine, Monica seeing her labours crowned with success, even beyond her expectation, and magnifying the Lord for so large a profusion of his mercies, coveted nothing more on earth than to be disengaged from the prison of her mortal body, and to shut her eyes to all created objects, in order to open them to Jesus Christ alone. Her last request was, that Augustine should remember her at the altar of God whenever he offered up the adorable sacrifice ; and with these pious sentiments bidding farewell to the world, her soul, as if impatient of farther delay, broke all the chains that linked it to the flesh, and flew to the chaste embraces of her heavenly spouse. Happy

they, who like her live up to their vocation, and faithfully comply with the duties of their respective states ! Intercede for us, O pious Monica, that we may be of the number of such happy souls. Thou didst formerly obtain, by thy fervent prayers, the conversion of thy son Augustine ; obtain for us also, we beseech thee, the like favour from the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, who vouchsafed to confirm thee in grace and crown thee with glory. O may thy virtues adorn our souls, that after following thy example here on earth, we may partake hereafter of that happiness which thou dost enjoy at present in the kingdom of Heaven. And which, my brethren, I wish you all, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*



END OF VOL. 1.

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